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THE ® saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

ICD

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Death in the Dressing Room
by CARTER DICKSON

Kidnapped Alphabet
by MacKINLAY KANTOR

Haunted Murderer
by THOMAS BURKE

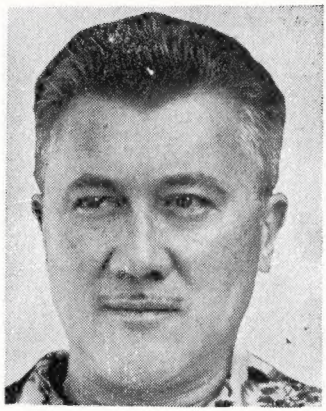
Loyal Candidate
by ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

The Bad Baron
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE AMY WAGGONER MURDER
A NEW NOVEL by FREDRIC BROWN

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



OCCASIONALLY one of our less corusc..ting readers (of which we must admit that even this highly intellectual periodical has a few) will emerge from the fog to brace us about the slogan which we hope you have noticed appears every month at the bottom of our cover: *"Some old, some new—the finest in mystery fiction."* Why, this dim spark wants to know, do we print anything *old?*

A little statistical reflection should give the answer. Merely to keep up with everything of this type that is currently being published would be a long day's work seven days a week for anyone; and since everyone except professional book reviewers and retired millionaires has to spend several hours a day doing something else designed to earn enough money to pay their taxes, the average reader is losing ground at a great rate from the day he starts. Furthermore, assuming that the corps of serious readers is roughly limited to the age range of 15 to 75, and they wanted to cover even half a century of the detective story, one-third of them would have an average of 25 years of past production to catch up with on top of the already hopeless task of staying abreast of the daily flood. (Check these calculations on your electronic computer.)

Yet nothing could be more fallacious, or deprive you of a richer reading pleasure, than to take the attitude that anything that is not the very latest can be passed up with as little loss as last week's newspaper. The Sherlock Holmes and Raffles chronicles are by no means the only important crime fiction of more than 25 years ago. Even the first Saint stories go back 30 years, to a time when about half of you were too young to be paying much attention. So it will continue to be our policy to bring you a quota of great stories which most of you probably missed when they were new. It would be an immortal pity if you went through life without reading some of the older gems of Dorothy Sayers, Austin Freeman, Agatha Christie, or Edgar Wallace, for instance—some of whom are not even around to write new stories any more.

Our star attraction this month, Fredric Brown's THE AMY WAGGONER MURDER, is the newest short novel of one of the newer top-flight writers. But we make no apologies for also featuring vintage pieces by such old masters as Carter Dickson, Thomas Burke, MacKinlay Kantor, and Arthur Somers Roche. Even this month's Saint story, THE BAD BARON, has a distinguished touch of gray at the temples. But after all, so has this venerable editor.

Leslie Charteris

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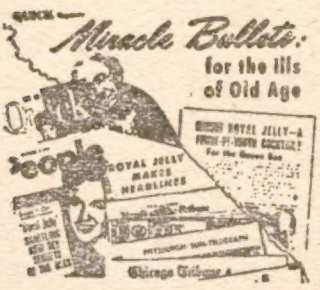
ROYAL JELLY, the Queen Bee's Special Food...ITS SECRET OF PROLONGED LIFE!



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Reports from Europe tell of an 80 year old Gentleman whose physical condition would make a 50 year old envious. The man regularly partakes of Royal Jelly. According to a book published in England, when Russian Officials sent questionnaires to all the Centenarians (people over 100 years old) in the Soviet Union, more than half of them turned out to be beekeepers.

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KARLSRUHE MEDICAL CONGRESS REPORTS

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● Royal Jelly acts on weakened, tired eyes, giving instantly a sensation of new light.

● Feeling of tiredeness disappears immediately.

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● Royal Jelly permits prolonged intellectual work without tiring.

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It is not surprising that Royal Jelly has attracted Medical Attention throughout the world... Here is the substance, the sole diet of the Queen Bee in which lies the secret of the difference between her and the rest of the hive. For the Queen lives to 6 years, whereas the 20 to 40 thousand worker bees and the few hundred drones live but a few short months. The Queen Bee larva looks like all the rest, including those of the female worker bees. But only SHE is fertile, producing some 400,000 eggs annually.

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the bad baron

by . . . Leslie Charteris

"IN THESE days of strenuous competition," said the Saint, "it's an extraordinarily comforting thing to know you're at the top of your profession—unchallenged, undismayed, and wholly beautiful."

His audience listened to him with a very fair simulation of reverence—Patricia Holm because she had heard similar modest statements so often before that she was beginning to believe them, Peter Quentin because he was the very latest recruit to the cause of Saintly lawlessness and the game was still new and exciting.

They had met together at the Mayfair for a cocktail; and the fact that Simon Templar's remark was not strictly true did nothing to spoil the prospect of an innocent evening's amusement.

For the Saint certainly had a rival; and of recent days a combination of that rival's boundless energy and Simon Templar's cautious self-effacement had placed another name in the position in the headlines which had once been regularly booked for the Saint. Newspapers screamed his exploits from their bills; music-hall comedians gagged about him; detec-

There were rewards for taking a light view of the law, the Saint argued, such as this chance to punish a rude man.

Claude Eustace was annoyed. Life was not any quieter since the Saint had apparently retired. The Fox had replaced Simon in the headlines.

tives tore their hair and endured the scathing criticisms of the Press and their superiors with as much fortitude as they could call on; and owners of valuable jewellery hurriedly deposited their valuables in safes and found a new interest in patent burglar alarms.

For jewels were the specialty of the man who was known as "The Fox"—there was very little else known about him. He burst upon the public in a racket of sensational banner lines when he held up Lady Palfrey's charity ball at Grosvenor House single-handed, and got clear away with nearly thirty thousand pounds' worth of display pieces. The clamour aroused by that exploit had scarcely passed its peak when he raided Sir Barnaby Gerrald's house in Berkeley Square and took a four-thousand-pound pearl necklace from a wall safe in the library while the Gerralds were entertaining a distinguished company to dinner in the next room. He opened and ransacked a Bond Street jeweller's strong-room the very next night at a cost to the insurance underwriters of over twenty thousand pounds. Within a week he was the topic of every conversation: Disarmament Conferences were relegated to obscure corners of the news sheets, and even Wimbledon took second place.

All three coups showed traces of careful preliminary spadework. It was obvious that the Fox had mapped out every move in advance, and that the headlines were merely proclaiming the results of a scheme of operations that had been maturing perhaps for years. It was equally obvious to surmise that the crimes which had already been committed were not the beginning and the end of the campaign. News editors (who rarely possess valuable jewels) seized on the Fox as a Heaven-sent gift in a flat season; and the Fox worked for them with a sense of news value that was something like the answer to their blasphemous prayers. He entered Mrs. Wilbur G. Tully's suite at the Dorchester and removed her jewel-case with everything that it contained while she was in the bathroom and her maid had been decoyed away on a false errand. Mrs. Tully sobbingly told the reporters that there was only one thing which never could be replaced—a diamond-and-amethyst pendant valued at a mere two hundred pounds, a legacy from her mother, for which she was prepared to offer a reward of twice its value. It was returned to her through the post the next morning, with a typewritten expression of the Fox's sincere apologies. The news editors bought cigars and wallowed in their Hour. They hadn't anything as good as that since the Saint appeared to go out of business, and they made the most of it.

It was even suggested that the

Fox might be the once notorious Saint in a new guise; and Simon Templar received a visit from Chief Inspector Teal.

"For once I'm not guilty, Claud," said the Saint, with considerable sadness; and the detective knew him well enough to believe him.

Simon had his private opinions about the Fox. The incident of Mrs. Tully's ancestral pendant did not appeal to him; he bore no actual ill-will towards Mrs. Tully, but the very prompt return of the article struck him as being a very ostentatious gesture to the gallery of a kind in which he had never indulged. Perhaps he was prejudiced. There is very little room for friendly rivalry in the paths of crime; and the Saint had his own human egotisms.

The fame of the Fox was brought home to him that evening through another line.

"There's a man who's asking for trouble," said Peter Quentin.

He pointed to a copy of the *Evening News* as it lay open on the table between the glasses. Simon leaned sideways and scanned it lazily.

THE MAN WHO IS NOT AFRAID OF BURGLARS

Three times attacked—
three times the winner

NO QUARTER!

BARON VON DORTVENN is one visitor to London who is not likely to spend any sleepless nights on account of the wave of crime with which the police are trying in vain to cope.

He has come to England to look after the bracelet of Charlemagne, which he is lending to the International Jewellery Exhibition which opens on Monday.

The famous bracelet is a massive circle of gold four inches wide and thickly encrusted with rubies. It weighs eight pounds, and is virtually priceless.

At present it is locked in the drawer of an ordinary desk at the house in Campden Hill which the Baron has rented for a short season. He takes it with him wherever he goes. It has been in the care of his family for five centuries, and the Baron regards it as a mascot.

Baron von Dortvenn scorns the precautions which would be taken by most people who found themselves in charge of such a priceless heirloom.

"Every criminal is a coward," the Baron told an *Evening News* representative yesterday. "I have been attacked three times in the course of my travels with the bracelet—"

"Sounds like a job for our friend the Fox," remarked Peter Quentin carelessly; and was amazed at the look Simon Templar gave him. It leapt from the Saint's eyes like blued steel.

"Think so?" drawled the Saint.

He skimmed the rest of the half-column, which was mainly concerned with the Baron's boasts of what he would do to anyone who attempted to steal his heirloom. Halfway down there was an inset photograph of a typical Junker with a double chin, close-cropped hair, monocle, and waxed moustaches.

"A nasty-looking piece of work," said the Saint thoughtfully.

Patricia Holm finished her Dry Sack rather quickly. She knew all the signs—and only that afternoon the Saint had hinted that he might behave himself for a week.

"I'm starving," she said.

They went into the restaurant, and the subject might have been forgotten during the Saint's profound study of the menu and wine list, for Simon had a very delicate discrimination in the luxuries of life. Let us say that the subject *might* have been forgotten —the opportunity to forget it simply did not arise.

"To get the best out of caviare, you should eat it like they used to in Rumania—in half-pound portions, with a soup-ladle," said the Saint, when the cloud of bustling waiters had dispersed.

And then he relaxed in his chair. Relaxed completely, and lighted a cigarette with infinite deliberation.

"Don't look round," he said. "The gent has got to pass our table. Just put it on record that I said I'd be damned."

The other two gazed at him vaguely and waited. A superb *chef de restaurant* came past, ushering a mixed pair of guests to a table on the other side of the room. One of them was a blonde girl, smartly dressed and rather good-looking in a statuesque way. The other was unmistakably the Baron von Dortvenn.

Simon could hardly keep his eyes off them. He barely trifled with his food, sipped his wine with no more interest than if it had been water, and lighted one cigarette from another with monotonous regularity. When the orchestra changed over to a dance rhythm, he pleaded that he was suffering from corns and left it to Peter Quentin to take Patricia on the floor.

The Baron was apparently not so afflicted.

He danced several times with his companion, and danced very badly. It was after a particularly elephantine waltz that Simon saw the girl, quite openly, dab her eyes with her handkerchief as she left the floor.

He leaned back even more lazily, with his eyes half closed and a cigarette merely smouldering in the corner of his mouth, and continued to watch. The couple were admirably placed for his observations—the girl facing him, and he saw the Baron in profile. And it became very plain to him that a

jolly *soiree* was definitely not being had by all.

The girl and the Baron were arguing—not loudly, but very vehemently—and the Baron was getting red in the face. He was clearly working himself into a vicious rage, and wrath did not make him look any more savoury. The girl was trying to be dignified, but she was breaking down. Suddenly, with a flash of spirit, she said something that obviously struck home. The Baron's eyes contracted, and his big hands fastened on the girl's wrists. Simon could see the knuckles whitening under the skin in the savage brutality of the grip, and the girl winced. The Baron released her with a callous fling of her arm that spilled a fork off the table; and without another word the girl gathered up her wrap and walked away.

She came towards the Saint on her way to the door. He saw that her eyes were faintly rimmed with red, but he liked the steady set of her mouth. Her steps were a little uncertain; as she reached his table she swayed and brushed against it, slopping over a few drops from a newly-filled wine-glass.

"I'm awfully sorry," she said in a low voice.

The Saint snapped a match between his fingers, and held her eyes.

"I saw what happened—let me get you a taxi."

He stood up and came around the table while she started to protest. He led her up the stairs and through the lobby to the street.

"Really—it's awfully nice of you to bother—"

"To tell you the truth," murmured the Saint, "I have met people with a better taste in barons."

The commissionaire hailed a taxi at the Saint's nod, and the girl gave an address in St. John's Wood. Simon allowed her to thank him again, and coolly followed her in before the commissionaire closed the door. The taxi pulled out from the curb before she could speak.

"Don't worry," said the Saint. "I was just feeling like a breath of fresh air, and my intentions are fairly honorable. I should probably have been obliged to smite your Baron on the nose if you hadn't left him when you did. Here—have a cigarette. It'll make you feel better."

The girl took a smoke from his case. They were held up a few yards farther on, in Piccadilly; and suddenly the door of the taxi was flung open and a breathless man in a double-breasted dinner-jacket appeared in the aperture.

"Pardon, madame—I did not sink I should catch you. It is yours, isn't it?"

He held up a small drop earring; and as he turned his head Simon recognized him as a solitary diner from a table adjoining his own.

"Oh!" The girl sat up, biting

her lip. "Thank you—thank you so much—"

"Il n'y a pas de quoi, madame," said the man happily. "I see it fall and I run after you, but always you're too quick. Now it's all right. I am content. Madame, you permit me to say you are a brave woman? I also saw everysing. Zat Baron—"

All at once the girl hid her face in her hands.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said chokingly. "You're all so sweet . . . Oh, my God! If only I could kill him! He deserves to be killed. He deserves to lose his beastly bracelet. I'd steal it myself—"

"Ah, but then you would be in prison, madame—"

"Oh, it'd be easy enough. It's on the ground floor—you'd only have to break open the desk. He doesn't believe in burglar-alarms. He's so sure of himself. But I'd show him. I'd make him pay!"

She turned away to the corner and sobbed hysterically.

Simon glanced at the little Frenchman.

"Elle se trouvera mieux chez elle," he said; and the other nodded sympathetically and closed the door.

The taxi drew away in a wedge of traffic and turned up Regent Street. Simon sat back in his corner and let the girl have her cry. It was the best possible thing for her; and he could have said nothing helpful.

They had a practically clear run through to St. John's Wood; and the girl recovered a little as they neared their destination. She wiped her eyes and took out a microscopic powder puff, with the unalterable vanity of women.

"You must think I'm a fool," she said, as the taxi slowed up. "Perhaps I am. But no one else can understand."

"I don't mind," said the Saint.

The cab stopped, and he leaned across her to open the door. Her face was within two inches of his, and the Saint required all adventures to be complete. In his philosophy, knight-errantry had its own time-honored rewards.

His lips touched hers unexpectedly; and then in a flash, with a soft laugh, he was out of the taxi. She walked past him and went up the steps of the house without looking back.

Simon rode back jubilantly to the Mayfair, and found his lady and Peter Quentin patiently ordering more coffee. The Baron had already left.

"I saw you leaving with the blonde Venus," said Peter enviously. "How on earth did you work it?"

"Is this a new romance?" smiled Patricia.

"You want to be careful of these Barons," said Peter. "Next thing you know, you'll have a couple of his pals clicking their

heels at you and inviting you to meet him in Hyde Park at dawn."

The Saint calmly annexed Peter Quentin's liqueur and tilted his chair backwards. Over the rim of his glass he exchanged bows with the chivalrous Frenchman at the adjoining table, who was paying his bill and preparing to leave; and then he surveyed the other two with a lazily reckless glint in his eye that could have only one meaning.

"Let's go home," he said.

They sauntered down Piccadilly to the block where the Saint's flat was situated; and there the Saint doffed his hat with a flourish, and kissed Patricia's hand.

"Lady, be good. Peter and I have a date to watch the moon rising over the Warrington waterworks."

In the same silence two immaculately dressed young men sauntered on to the garage where the Saint kept his car. Nothing was said until one of them was at the wheel, with the other beside him, and the great silver Hirondel was humming smoothly past Hyde Park Corner. Then the fair-haired one spoke.

"Campden Hill, I suppose?"

"You said it," murmured the Saint. "Baron von Dortvenn has asked for it once too often."

He drove slowly past the house for which Baron von Dortvenn had exchanged the *schloss* that was doubtless his more natural background. It was a gaunt Victorian edifice, standing apart from the adjacent houses in what for London was an unusually large garden, surrounded by a six-foot brick wall topped by iron spikes. As far as the Saint could see, it was in darkness; but he was not really concerned to know whether the Baron had come home or whether he had passed on to seek a more amenable candidate for his favors in one of the few night clubs that the police had not yet closed down. Simon Templar was out for justice, and he could not find his opportunity too soon.

Twenty yards beyond the house he disengaged the gear lever and swung himself out while the car was coasting to a standstill. It was then only half-past eleven, but the road was temporarily deserted.

"Turn the bus round, Peter, and pretend to be tinkering with the engine. Hop back into it at the first sounds of any excitement, and be on your toes for a quick getaway. I know it's bad technique to plunge into a burglary without getting the lie of the land first, but I shall sleep like a child tonight if I have the bracelet of Charlemagne under my mattress."

"You aren't going in alone," said Peter Quentin firmly.

He had the door on his side of the car open; but the Saint caught his shoulder.

"I am, old lad. I'm not making a fully-fledged felon of you sooner than I can help—and if we were both inside there'd be no

one to cover the retreat if the Baron's as hot as he tells the world."

His tone forbade argument. There was a quietly metallic timbre in it that would have told any listener that this was the Saint's own private picnic. And the Saint smiled. He punched Peter Quentin gently in the biceps, and was gone.

The big iron gates that gave entrance to the garden were locked —he discovered that at the first touch. He went on a few yards and hooked his fingers over the top of the wall. One quick springy heave, and he was on top of the wall, clambering gingerly over the spikes. As he did so he glanced towards the house, and saw a wisp of black shadow detach itself from the neighborhood of a ground-floor window and flit soundlessly across a strip of lawn into the cover of a clump of laurels.

The Saint dropped inside the garden on his toes, and stood there swiftly knotting a handkerchief over the lower part of his face. The set of his lips was a trifle grim. Someone else was also on the job that night—he had only just arrived in time.

He slipped along the side of a hedge towards the spot where the black shadow had disappeared; but he had underrated the first intruder's power of silent movement. There was a sudden scuff of shoes on the turf behind him, and the Saint swerved and ducked like lightning. Something whizzed past his head and struck his shoulder a numbing blow: he shot out an arm and grabbed hold of a coat, jerking his assailant towards him. His left hand felt for the man's throat.

It was all over very quickly, without any noise. Simon lowered the unconscious man to the ground, and flashed the dimmed beam of a tiny pocket torch on his face. A black mask covered it— Simon whipped it off and saw the sallow face of the Frenchman who had followed him with the unfortunate girl's earring.

The Saint snapped off his flashlight and straightened up with his mouth pursed in a noiseless whistle that widened into a smile. Verily, he was having a night out. . . .

He glided across the lawn to the nearest window, feeling around for the catch with a thin knife-blade. In three seconds it gave way, and he slid up the sash and climbed nimbly over the sill. His feet actually landed on the baronial desk. The top drawer was locked: he squeezed a fine steel claw in above the lock and levered adroitly. The drawer burst open with a crash, and the beam of his torch probed its interior. Almost the first thing he saw was a heavy circlet of dull yellow, which caught the light from a hundred crimson facets studded over its surface. Simon picked it up and

shoved it into his pocket. Its great weight dragged his coat all over on one side.

And at that moment all the lights in the room went on.

The Saint whirled around.

He looked into the single black eye of an automatic held in the hand of Baron von Dortvenn himself. On either side of the Baron was a heavily-built, hard-faced man.

"So you're the Fox?" said the Baron genially.

Simon thanked heaven for the handkerchief that covered his face. The two hard-faced men were advancing towards him, and one of them jingled a pair of handcuffs.

"On the contrary," said the Saint, "I'm the Bishop of Bootle and Upper Tooting."

He held out his wrists resignedly. For a moment the man with the handcuffs was between him and the Baron's automatic, and the Saint took his chance. His left whizzed round in a terrific hook that smacked cleanly to its mark on the side of the man's jaw, and Simon leapt on to the desk. He went through the window in a flying dive, somersaulted over his hands, and was on his feet again in an instant.

He sprinted across the lawn and went over the wall like a cat. A whistle screamed into the night behind him, and he saw Peter Quentin tumble into the car as he dropped down to the pavement. Simon jumped for the Hirondel as it streaked past, and fell over the side into the seat beside the driver.

"Give her the gun," he ordered briefly, "and dodge as you've never dodged before. I think they'll be after us."

"What happened?" asked Peter Quentin; and the Saint unfastened the handkerchief from his face and grinned.

"It looks like they were waiting for someone," he said.

It took twenty minutes of brilliant driving to satisfy the Saint that they were safe from any possible pursuit. On the way Simon took the heavy jewelled armlet from his pocket and gazed at it lovingly under one of the dashboard lamps.

"That's one thing the Fox didn't put over," he said cryptically.

HE WAS breakfasting off bacon and eggs the next morning at eleven o'clock when Peter Quentin walked in. Peter carried a morning paper, which he tossed into the Saint's lap.

"There's something for your 'Oh, yeah?' album," he said grimly.

Simon poured out a cup of coffee.

"What is it—some more intelligent utterances by Cabinet Ministers?"

"You'd better read it," said Peter. "It looks as if several people made mistakes last night."

Simon Templar picked up the

paper and started at the double-column splash.

"THE FOX" CAPTURED
C.I.D. WAKES UP
BRILLIANT COUP IN
KENSINGTON

ONE OF THE CLEVEREST STRATAGEMS in the history of criminal detection achieved its object at eleven-thirty last night with the arrest of Jean-Baptiste Arvaille, alleged to be the famous jewel thief known as "The Fox."

Arvaille will be charged at the police court this morning with a series of audacious robberies totalling over £70,000.

It will be told how Inspector Henderson, of Scotland Yard, assisted by a woman member of the Special Branch, posed as "Baron von Dortvenn" and baited the trap with a mythical "bracelet of Charlemagne" which he was stated to have brought to England for the International Jewellery Exhibition.

The plot owed much of its success to the cooperation of the Press, which gave the fullest possible publicity to the "Baron's" arrival.

It was stated in this newspaper yesterday that the "bracelet of Charlemagne" was a circle of gold thickly encrusted with rubies.

In actual fact it is made of lead, thinly plated with gold, and the stones in it are worthless imitations. Workmen sworn to secrecy created it specially for Inspector Henderson's use.

Simon Templar read through the whole detailed story. After which he was speechless for some time.

And then he smiled.

"Oh, well," he said, "it isn't everyone who can say he's kissed a woman policeman."

For as long as it has been a fashionable playground for the wealthy, the Riviera has been a natural hunting ground for equally cosmopolitan thieves. In such company, the Saint was bound to find his own niche.

THE BETTER MOUSETRAP,

A New Saint Story by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in the next SAINT

haunted murderer

by . . . Thomas Burke

Fear can make you do and see many strange things, particularly when you fear retribution nears. . . .

I HAVE heard many times (said old Quong) that conscience makes cowards of us all, but I have never had an authenticated case brought to my knowledge. What is undoubtedly true, and each of us can prove it from his own observation, is that conscience can and does make fools of us all. As it did in the tale of the yellow imps, which I have not, I believe, told you before. Indeed, I am sure I have not, because I only thought of it this morning, so I need not employ that disarming stroke of the polite English entertainer and request you to stop me if you have heard it.

I had never at any time been under the necessity of stopping old Quong. My chief trouble was in starting him and keeping him in progress. The tale of the yellow imps seemed to work itself out like this.

There was a high wind in London one October evening, and among others who struggled under it was a man in a blue macintosh. It made hats fly and frocks dance. It set the lamplight fluttering as a bird flutters when an alien

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Thomas Burke, perhaps best known for his LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS *and* THE LONDON SPY, *came closer than most writers in these days to capturing the flavor and the spirit of a London few Americans ever see. Here is one of the fables told him by old Quong in the backroom of his tea-shop.*

Originally published as "The Yellow Imps" in
A TEA-SHOP IN LIMEHOUSE by Thomas Burke.
Copyright, 1931, by Thomas Burke.

hand approaches its cage. The pavements were glistening with recent rain, and it made them shiver. The roadways were lakes of ebony, and it set broken pieces of the lamplight skating upon them. It whipped columns of chimney smoke into one maelstrom. Only the houses stood rigid before it; they acknowledged it as a man acknowledges a buzzing fly.

But to man himself it was no mere fly, it was unloosed power, and to the man in the blue macintosh, with whom we are concerned, it was destiny. Dead bricks it could not move, but the man in the blue macintosh, symbol of the immortal, was its toy, and it was now driving him, against half his will, to commit the sin that the other half wanted to commit. It first pestered his face, and stung his eyes, and chilled his hands, and filled his heart with its own rage: then it drove him out of his path into Bayswater.

He was faintly aware that he was grateful to the wind. By assuming the function of destiny it made his half-purpose a purpose. He hadn't really meant to turn into that road; he believed that he had meant to go past it, but while he stood at the corner, thinking the thing over, a sudden gust caught him under his macintosh and sent him running some paces down it. When the gust eased he found that he was actually in Leinster Gardens, and that to get out of it he would have to turn and battle again with the wind, and he was tired of battling. Here, clearly, was the hand-push of destiny. Useless to resist that. Being in Leinster Gardens, he felt that he was meant to go on. The affair had been decided for him by the wind. His infirmity of purpose now became upright, and he allowed that wind, which could not move the houses, to whirl him to disaster.

In the lavender dusk the interlocked squares and terraces of Bayswater made a map of the land of nightmare. The lines of tall dark houses looming upward and stretching forward to infinity, the lines of lamps that waited like a frozen guard for a procession that never came, the deep hush, the sudden enclosed spaces of whispering trees, and the insane repetition of terrace upon terrace—all this made this bourgeois quarter the apt setting for a tale of horror. Horror seldom grows among horror, almost always it springs up in the incongruous air of pastoral beauty or urban decorum; but if ever horror should outstrip itself in London, Bayswater should be its setting.

Now that he had got into Leinster Gardens, he began to walk up and down, and for half an hour he went up and down, pad-pad-pad, eye and mind directed to one house. By the disposition of the street lights he was sometimes energy and sometimes reverie. Now, as he crossed the amber

radius of the lamplight, he lived as a man; now, as he passed into the interspaces of purple, he was an impalpable organism. That flickering march was a miniature of his life. Pad-pad-pad he went, fixed like a shuttle in a groove of two hundred yards, while all around him beat the life of this city of glittering distances.

At six o'clock he was in the house. He was standing behind a velvet hanging that draped the connecting door of the smoking-room and the study. He was on the study side, and was peering through the opening of the hanging into its dusky depths. He saw a large room strewn with rugs of Daghestan and Kerman and Coulas, and set with appointments that confirmed the rugs. Clearly the study of a rich man of over-opulent tastes. There were deep divan chairs in glowing yellow hide. The dark yellow walls were dressed with Oriental banners and curved weapons. On brackets and tables stood Buddhas and Shivas, large and small. On the mantel-shelf and on other shelves were idols with movable heads; with the passing of heavy traffic, their shaven crowns nodded in various rhythms, as at some secret thought. These figures nodding out of the shadows fascinated the man: he had the feeling of being spied upon. Elsewhere were great vases of the Sung and Ming period, and carvings in coral and rock-crystal; and on the desk in the center of the room, scattered among inkstand and cigar-box and lamp-standard, were a number of small figures and netsukes in old ivory. The dominant note of the room, struck by the rugs and taken up by the wallpaper, the vases, the idols, the chairs and the ivory, was gold; and this note expressed its owner.

At the moment when the man behind the curtain, no longer beaten by the wind, was relaxing in his purpose under the hush and warmth of the room, it received three bursts of light from its electric lamps, and his victim stood within his reach. Gold, or hues verging upon gold, was about his person as well as about his room. There was the hard bronze face, the amber-colored waistcoat, the amber cigar-holder, the watch-chain, and the russet tie, and as he stood for a second or two by one of the rugs he had the appearance of a golden god in a setting of gold receiving the homage of his nodding priests. That was his last appearance in magnificence, and it was an appearance of four seconds only, for the fifth second he was on his back across the desk, and the floor was littered with cigars and the little ivory figures.

With one spring the man in the macintosh fell upon him. With fingers at throat, he forced the head back. But it was an uncalculated spring; it was taken in the moment when resolution was weakening; and there was no cer-

tainty behind it. Even with his fingers at that throat he couldn't be sure that he was going to do it. Even in the next few ticks of the clock, when he had in his hand a gold dagger snatched from the desk—even then he wasn't sure that he was going to do it. He could still, if he wished, drop the dagger and take his fingers from the throat, and try to laugh it away as an insane joke, or a rough-and-tumble assault. But he didn't know whether he *did* wish to do that, he didn't know what he wished to do; the room had softened and bewildered him, and he was trying to make a firm decision this way or that when the gold man made it for him.

The gold man wrenched his neck aside, and through closed jaws spluttered one word. On that word down came the dagger into the neck, and down it came again into the side just below the arm. As it was drawn back for a third stroke, and the pressure on the throat a little loosened, the gold man made a death-heave and broke away. They fell, and on the floor, among the litter of ivories, they struggled softly. The vibration set the solemn idols nodding to each other— Look, look, look! There were slow gasps and hot panting. They spluttered. The gold man could make no words, but the blue macintosh was crisp. "There —that shuts *your* mouth. *You* won't talk much more. How's *that?*"

A third time the dagger came down, this time full into the throat. There was a gurgle, a sigh, and then peace. The blue macintosh got up. It was done. After months of approaching it and retreating from it, of nursing it and dismissing it, it was done. He had tried to frighten himself out of it by visualizing himself as a murderer in the dock and in the condemned cell and on the scaffold. He had tried to laugh himself out of it by imagining himself doing it—a ludicrous picture. He had tried to kill the idea by observing it from the outside as the silly antics of a fool. And now he had done it. Well, he must see about fixing things.

He stood over the body and bent himself to a question-mark, listening. But the great house was silent and still. Nobody had seen him enter, nobody, it seemed, had heard their struggle, and, by familiarity with the man's habits, he knew that nobody would come to the study until the dinner-gong was sounded. He looked down at the body and the blood-stained carpet and ivories, and then at his own clothes. No marks or stains that he could see. The dagger was still in the body, and could stay there; by his precaution of wearing gloves the haft could hold no clue. To assure himself that he had missed no danger-points he made a quick glance around the room, and in the moment of that glance his forehead froze. At every point

of the room was something that grinned and nodded at him. Then he remembered the idols and laughed. But the moment was useful; it showed that he hadn't yet come to himself. He must wake up and be wary. One must be specially wary in matters like this—much more wary than in his ordinary business. He found himself shaking a little, and his thoughts had a tendency to stray from the immediate business. That wouldn't do. His eye caught the glint of a series of decanters and glasses. Perhaps they would help. He never touched anything like that when on his regular business; but this was different. It was a new crisis for him, and a little slowing-down of his nerves might be useful.

He stepped through the litter of ivories and cigars, and opened the first decanter and poured himself a drunkard's draught. It was brandy. He drank it in quick sips, neat, keeping his ears tightened for the tiniest sound. When it was done he found that he was still trembling, still unable to fix his mind on the best way of meeting the situation. He turned to the whiskey. In a few seconds he felt more at ease. A goods van went past the house, and the idols, which had recovered from the vibrations of the struggle, were set nodding again. With ferocious geniality he nodded back at them. One more peg—then he would be ready for a clean exit. He took it, this time in one gulp; then went across to the switches and turned off the light.

And here came another spot of panic. The sudden plunge of darkness gave him the shock of an unexpected plunge downstairs. He could have screamed. It was so complete a darkness that it came with a burning pain upon his hot eyes, and in the sudden void of black he staggered and almost fell. Staring into it, seeking his way to the window, he could see the projected aureole of his own eyes just beyond the temples; and as he looked past that glow into the pit of darkness he saw it filled not with bloody faces or nodding idols, but with amorphous bodies of fear. The corners of the black room were breeding gray shadows, and the gray shadows bred purple shadows, and the purple shadows bred other shadows blacker even than the blackness of the room. Each shadow was a growth of new and stronger fear.

Never before had he been afraid, and he did not know how to handle himself. The knowledge that he was afraid surprised him. He made a gesture of bewilderment. Putting his hands to his face, he found that they were damp with sweat, and that his heart was a dynamo. The hostile mixture of brandy and whiskey was working, and as the realization of that went slowly into his brain and showed him his danger, instead of sobering him, it made

him laugh. He told himself that he was too old a hand to be flustered by accidents. He was drunk. That's what it was—drunk. Just that. Those shadows were whiskey and brandy shadows. They weren't there at all. Funny one should feel afraid of nothing just because one had killed a brute.

Still, it would be wise to get away, and to get away as tactfully as he had come. He went to the window, swaying across the rug and turning his ankle on the scattered ivories. In the middle of the room he stopped and listened, wondering whether his drunken self might not have made some noise that his other self had not heard. But the whole house seemed as stark and dumb as the corpse on the floor. Only the ticking of the clock, for sound, and the nodding of the idols, for motion. Nothing else.

He put his gloved fingers to the window, raised it without noise, and looked out. He waited for a lorry to pass; then slid to the sill. He pulled the window down behind him. He reached forward from a kneeling position, and with one hand grasped a gutter-pipe that ran down the front of the house to the area. With the animal grace of a dancer he swung himself clear of the kitchen windows and landed on his toes by the entrance-porch of the next house. Some half minute he stood there with the air of one waiting for the bell to be answered. This was his method of proving whether an exit had been "clean." It seemed that it was. He heard no stir anywhere, and met no curious eyes. With a glance of apparent disappointment he went down the steps and walked casually away. The wind was behind him, as it had been behind him at half-past five.

Once out and free, he was conscious of the wild air, and discovered that in the last half-hour he had not taken one full breath. Breathing was a momentary luxury, and he breathed deep. He filled his lungs with the rushing air, breathing in time with his long steps. He was making for the canal, where he had planned to sink his macintosh and soft hat, and he was almost upon it when his long breathing defeated him. He was feeling once again master of himself and of the occasion when, without warning, earth and sky twisted into one, and the moon came reeling and crashing through the wind into a chaos of nausea and vomit.

When, some minutes later, he came up from this collapse, he found himself clinging to the railings of Porchester Square. His legs were weak and his ears were buzzing and his eyes were blocked by a picture of the gold man's face as he last saw it when they lay wrestling on the floor. A popular dance-melody came into his head. He tried to drive it away by thinking of other melodies and of

conversational phrases, but it came back and danced upon his brain. He began to be afraid that he would sing it or whistle it. That would never do. Mustn't attract attention. Must be careful. With a jerk he pulled himself up, loosened his collar and prepared to walk on.

It was at this moment of moving away that he first became clearly aware of a noise that had been troubling his ear under the dance-melody, a little clittering as of fairy castanets. He looked about him, into the square, along the railings, and then at the pavement, and as he saw how the noise was being made a frozen wire went down his spine. He was nearly a mile from the house in Leinster Gardens, but there they were. They had trotted after him, and they were now trotting round him —the little golden blood-stained netsukes. His brain was still slumbering under the drink, but at this sight it came to a kind of cloudy awakening that deceived him into thinking it was a true awakening. There they were, clearly enough, running around his feet, jumping, curvetting in the frightful contortions of Oriental carpets. They were making arabesques all round him.

He did not attempt to imagine how the thing had happened. It *had* happened; and he was sensible enough to see the danger of the situation. If people passed and saw him like this, they might come and ask awkward questions. Certainly they would remember having seen him with these things all round him; and they would make a guess that he had stolen them and dropped them in running; and they might speak to the next policeman. He must pick them up and hide them. He bent towards them, toppled, and snatched at them; but in his nervous haste he was clumsy, and they were too quick for him. They dodged and doubled, and danced under and over his hand. Not one could he hold, and meantime they pestered him and leapt about him, and vexed his eyes with their dartings. He felt one of them warm and wet against his cheek.

Well, if he couldn't pick them up he must get away. He had forgotten now about the canal and his macintosh. The important matter was to get away from these blood-stained things, and he clambered up and turned his back on them, and went with a quick lurch through the square. He kept as much out of the light as he could. To deceive them he made two or three crossings and recrossings of the road. In Gloucester Terrace he could see nothing of them, and was applauding himself at having shaken them off, when in Cleveland Square his ear told him that his stratagem had failed. Close behind him came the sound of castanets. Soon they caught up with him and encircled him. He broke through them, and they again en-

circled him. He kicked at them, but still they made their undisciplined ballet between his feet. Some of them leapt at him in Lilliput anger. The faces of these held the features of the dead man on the floor. He tried to turn back towards the stir and glare of Harrow Road, where he might lose them, but they buzzed and twisted about his knees with the infuriating pester of mosquitoes. For peace he was compelled to go forward.

He went at a half-running pace, and all the time they were with him. They kept about him, before and behind, in a sort of open order. When he ran, they ran; when he trotted, they trotted; and when he kicked at them he kicked only the air. He was sobbing now, striking with arms and legs. As he stumbled on through the lamplit dusk of Craven Road he was aware that the few people who passed looked curiously at him. No wonder. A man being chased by little golden men.

But he was not now so concerned with the figure he cut. He was mainly concerned with dodging these damnable things. They filled him with the crawling horror of necromancy. He felt that they had Satanic powers drawn from all the objects of that room, and from their owner. Whichever way he turned they were with him, sometimes driving him, sometimes impeding him. Some of them settled on his trousers. With inward gasps he struck them off. Some of them jumped high in the air and pattered elfin clog-dances on the crown of his hat. They played about him with the intimate deviltry of afreets. As they pattered and buzzed, it seemed to him that they called on other little golden things to join them. Coming into a half-lit square, he was met by a new host. He turned right and left, but only when he went straight on did they suspend their pestering. Even at those dark corners where he could not see them he could still hear them and feel them.

He went forward at a shamble, and as he went he thought again of the canal. If he could get there he might elude them. If he could get into the water they couldn't follow him there. He could swim across or stay in the water; they surely couldn't walk on water.

He turned for the canal, but as he turned they made a cloud about him, and he lost his direction. He could only go blindly forward.

Then, as he came out of the square into a side-street, they seemed to turn aside to his right, the whole host of them. He was fighting them with both arms when he saw that there was a clear space on his left, and that they had dropped behind him. Before him he saw an open door and a lighted hall. If he could get in there.

He got in. In the hall a man met him. He addressed the man

in whimpering indignation. "I say —look here—all these things following me. Can't get along the street for them. Perfect pest."

"Oh? What's the trouble? What things?"

"Those things out there. Little gold men. Followed me from Leinster Gardens. Worse'n mosquitoes. All round one's face."

"Followed you from Leinster Gardens? Let's have a look at 'em. Here—hold up."

He swayed, and supported himself with an arm on the wall. "Ah —all the way from Leinster Gardens."

"I see. You better sit down a bit. Little golden men, eh? Leinster Gardens? Come and sit down."

The Inspector led him to a farther room, and spoke to two men in the room. "Just look after this man. He's a bit faint." The two men got up, and as one of them caught the Inspector's eye, he closed the door and stood against it.

The Inspector went to the telephone at the desk in the hall, and the October gale continued to rush down the street and fill the hall with companies of yellow leaves.

NEXT MONTH—

August Derleth's THE DORRINGTON INHERITANCE

Sir Philip Gibbs' DEATH BESIDE THE PYRAMIDS

Lawrence Treat's SING A SONG OF MURDER

Barry Perowne's THE ROOKING OF RAFFLES

Hugh Wiley's PARMILL HAS DISAPPEARED

Bruce Graeme's CHEQUEMATE

and

THE BETTER MOUSETRAP,

A New Saint Story by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in *The Saint Detective Magazine*

press agent for murder

by . . . Walter Snow

Scoop had agreed to the stunt after some persuasion, but he hadn't counted on murder—and on Doll Davis getting involved.

TO BE press agent of a Broadway hit show is a sweet racket. Not only do fat paychecks parade for a year or two, with a rich season always ahead on the road; not only do the drama desk boys come begging for cheesecake (and an extra two on the aisle)—even city editors suggest stunts that they'd veto from any other brain.

But if your next show is a polite British import like *Murder in the Vicar's Rose Garden* . . . It opened on a snowy Thursday evening and was shipped to Cain's Warehouse the following sleety Saturday night. It was spring now, circus weather three months later, and I had been grinding out only such tantalizing, sexy releases as were suggested by a Brooklyn coffin-maker's account and by the Marceled Greek, two hundred and forty pounds of the grunt-and-groan trade. I had moved from the Astor Hotel to a fleabag. So I couldn't be choosey about clients.

Standing in front of a short beer in Nardi's, this long drink guy, myself, was disgusted nevertheless to be watching the backbar clock anxiously.

Walter Snow, veteran newspaperman and widely anthologized mystery writer, who now lives in Willimantic, Conn., makes a first appearance in these pages with this quiet story of a press agent, hired to beat the drums for a one-time circus great, Major Mite the Third, who gets involved in murder.

I had an appointment with Major Mite III, who once had his day in the third-rate circuses and four-car carneys when he stood just thirty-eight inches. In an earlier lean season of flop-peroos, I had been drum-beater for his wedding to Bertha Brown, better known as Bertha Buster, Miss Six-by-Six, the World's Fattest Lady. I didn't like to think about that. I'm not a hearts-and-flowers sentimentalist but the marriage, a standard circus stunt, seemed a grotesque mockery and had proven disastrous.

Now I heard him behind me, tapping his shortened blackthorn cane impatiently. There was nothing to see in the bottom of my short beer, except a few malt bubbles, and I didn't have the price of another. I pretended to look out of the window at a steam roller chugging along the resurfaced northern half of West 44th Street. The blackthorn stick poked into the back of my knee with a vicious jab that hurt. I turned around angrily.

Major Mite III had the shiveled face of a mummy and the hairy ears of a monkey. He was no longer a true midget. Shortly after his marriage, he had that peculiar belated growth, which is the terror of the freak business, and had shot up eight extra inches. That left him no longer a sideshow midget but a sideline runt. With the body of a stunted Dead End kid, he couldn't land a job in his old profession. But he flashed a crisp twenty-spot.

"Just a small down payment, Scoop," said a deep voice with a nasty chuckle. He knew ex-newspapermen thoroughly disliked that cub-reporterish nickname. He added: "I'm also buying drinks."

Nardi's has the smallest bar in the Broadway district, standing room only, but this was Friday afternoon, no matinees, and we were the sole customers. I fetched a red leather-covered stool from the cloakroom, hoisted Major Mite III on top. There we were at a tiny half-moon bar in front of the window for everybody to see us together.

Since he had suggested this public display, I made mine a double bourbon while he started to sip one of those tall pink concoctions that lady show-offs favor. I asked how Bertha was.

"It's just 2 P. M., isn't it?" said the Major, squinting up at the backbar clock.

"Uh-huh. The time's always accurate here, so folks won't be late returning from intermissions. How's Bertha?"

"Dosing herself as usual with Lydia B. Pinkham's nostrum, five-pound boxes of chocolates and placebo capsules filled with pink sugar. Listen, Scoop! I've got an idea that will land me in Ringling's. A publicity stunt!"

"You and three thousand other

grifters. *The Bronx Home News* isn't published any more."

"This is a natural, Scoop. You plant three press photogs in front of the Paramount Theatre. You hire a drive-yourself car, go tearing down Broadway. There's a gal I know, a circus tumbler. She does her act. Major Mite rushes to the rescue as flashguns pop. Ain't that something for the tabloids?"

"If you were Clark Gable. Otherwise it's corn. Even copy boys would reject it as a phony. Damn it, Major, why don't you take an honest job as a clown?"

"Clowns work too hard. Sure, I'm lazy but I know somebody else who is also."

Always a dig, a poke. I asked: "By the way, who's your tumbler?"

The runt licked thick lips. "A cute blonde, Doll Davis."

The name struck me like a kidney punch. Doll Davis stood just five feet in high heels. She was a saucy babe, who played hard to get, being interested in marriage. When I was press agenting a smash hit, she had been a lot of fun. Afterwards, when there was just coffee and cake money, and little of that, she had argued that I should return to newspaper work. She had been insistent and I had called her a gold-digger. I hadn't seen Doll Davis for several weeks. I was through with her but felt queasy to think that this hairy-eared runt was even on speaking terms with such a cute dish. Maybe Doll was hard up; circus folk only work in spring and summer and there are not as many "big tops" as there used to be.

"Say, Scoop, will you call Bertha? Tell her I'm in conference."

The Major was holding up a thin dime. Reluctantly, I took the greasy coin and phoned Aunt Aggie's Theatrical Rooming House, which was almost around the corner—just across Eighth Avenue and one block north on West 45th Street.

Aunt Aggie had once been a tattooed lady. Her dry cackle answered. It took five minutes and a second dime before the elephantine Bertha boomed out with her hoarse bellow,

"Is the Mite getting plastered, huh? If he's out with one of his bleached blondes, he doesn't have to come back, ever."

From the phone booth I could see my potential client still squatting on the high stool and a moment later gave him an accurate report.

"Bertha used to have a sweet disposition," said the Major, and immediately came up with a second screwball stunt, a third and then a fourth idea, all featuring the redoubtable Doll Davis. Each mention of the cute kid's name made me wince anew but the Major continually forked out new bills for one round after another.

During the second hour, I was seeing the good points of my coffin-maker client. During the third hour, I thought the Marceled Greek might become a wrestler. The Major, however, seemed a chimpanzee, an orang-utang and an ape, all drinking Pink Ladies. He knew I needed dough-rei-me. The ante was raised. It was hell to be that broke.

For a thirty buck advance, I finally agreed to the auto-tumble-rescue. Privately, I resolved not to call in press photogs. I couldn't continue being a drum-beater if I got on City Room screwball lists. I would hire one free lance photog, deliver a couple of prints anonymously. They would go into wastebaskets, of course, but hadn't I warned the dope?

"It's 5 o'clock," said the Major. "Isn't that 5, Joe? Guess we'd better hunt up our tumbler. Poor Doll Davis hasn't been able to land a job yet. She helps Aunt Aggie with the maid's work."

Lifting the runt down from the high stool, I found that my own legs were rubbery. The floor of Nardi's was pitching like a PT boat in a typhoon. Somehow the Major could still walk. He guided me across the sidewalk to a cab, which stopped just opposite the steam roller. Dazedly, I wished that the street repairmen would flatten the runt like a pancake.

Next he was elbowing me up the brownstone stoop of Aunt Aggie's when I discovered that two green-and-white radio cars were outside. Just as the sea-green billows swept over me, I heard Ike Stein, Manhattan-West Homicide, remark that Bertha Brown Mite was dead.

A quart of black Brazilian spoiled my free jag. First-Grade Detective Stein, a moon-faced man with rimless glasses and the sartorial splendor of a banker, explained that Bertha, all three hundred and fifty pounds of her, had collapsed across the threshold of her first-floor rear room while yelling for Aunt Aggie. She fell like a block-buster.

Two stock company ingenues, one aging matinee idol, a vaudeville juggler and a circus tumbler all noticed the time. Precisely at 4 P. M.

"The assistant medexam," said Ike Stein, "smelled a faint whiff of bitter almonds on the dead woman's lips."

The detective stared through rimless glasses at an empty bottle labeled, "Take one capsule every two hours." He telephoned the druggist and learned that the prescription was a harmless bismuth concoction for indigestion.

"Bertha was a sickly woman," said Major Mite III. "I never dreamed she was so despondent. If I had thought dear Bertha had suicidal ideas, I'd never have left her alone since 1:50 P. M."

"That's a lie," spoke up Doll Davis.

"How long were you and the Major in a distillery?" demanded Ike Stein.

I felt like a heel. I had to confirm the fact that we had been in Nardi's for three solid hours, 2 P.M. to 5 P.M., and that Joe, the barkeep; the hatchick and even Vincenzio Nardi himself were witnesses to the time-alibi.

"Tell me, Doll," asked the detective quietly, "do you still insist that the Major came in here this afternoon?"

"I didn't mean that. I meant the blarney of a great devotion act. Everyone knows that Bertha has been supporting the Major for two years, was sick of it. Why, only last week Bertha made a will cutting him off with a single dollar. She left all her savings, ten grand, to me because I've been like a daughter to her. The will is in a Chinese box on top of a high cabinet."

We had been questioned in Aunt Aggie's front parlor and now tramped down the hall. Although the body had been removed to the morgue an hour earlier, with four men staggering under the weight of the basket, the large rear bedroom still seemed haunted by the gargantuan dead woman. There was a specially constructed bed covered with two three-quarter mattresses. In one corner, two armless rocking chairs had been nailed together to provide a seat for the World's Fattest Lady. A straight-backed chair had legs sawed short for the Major.

In another corner was a wall medicine cabinet, with an ottoman below it. From that position, the runt could just reach the bottom and second shelves. A foot and a half higher, on the top, gleamed a cloisonne box with a dragon design. Inside were two bankbooks with balances totaling $10,000, and nothing else. The decorative Aunt Aggie and the aging matinee idol both volunteered that they had witnessed Bertha's last testament. She'd kept it in the Chinese box but it wasn't there and a search disclosed no trace of the document elsewhere.

"My dear wife," said the Major, "might have changed her mind about leaving her savings to Doll Davis. What happens if Bertha died intestate?"

"You know the answer," said Detective Stein gruffly. "You collect the whole ten gees."

All of us were summoned the next morning to Aunt Aggie's lodging house. While waiting in the freak bedroom for Ike Stein, I asked Doll if she'd offered to do a publicity stunt with the Major. With a wry face, she explained that it was only because Bertha wanted the runt to secure a job so she'd be rid of him.

"And you, you lug," she

added, "you didn't even have the excuse of trying to help out a friend."

Before I could deliver a fitting retort, Ike Stein bustled in. The medexam's toxicologist, he said, reported that the bitter almond smell proved to be cyanide of potassium. A dose of 0.15 gram spelled death within minutes.

"Bertha died at 4 P.M. while the Major and Scoop were at Nardi's from 2 to 5," continued the detective. "Seemingly they're eliminated but they aren't. Bertha was killed by a sort of poison time-bomb. The cyanide was placed in a medicine capsule so thick that it required more than two hours for the warmth of the stomach to melt it."

"You found fingerprints on the poison, maybe?" asked the Major.

"Damn you!" exploded Stein. "I know you killed your wife—you have the disposition and the motive—but I can't prove it. That's why I summoned you all here. I want help. One bit of evidence that can be presented in court."

"That cloisonne box," spoke up Doll Davis. "The Major couldn't quite reach it when he went to destroy the will. He poked it down from the top of the medicine cabinet. That's how it got cracked."

"Sure, sure," said the detective. "I was ahead of you."

"I know the Major was a poker," insisted Doll.

Stein groused that she'd told him that already but I saw that Doll was looking at me and frowning. She'd guessed I'd gone to sleep with my clothes on. Presently she stepped over to me and started to brush something off the back of my trousers. It was sticky.

"Lift me on your shoulder, lug," she whispered. "I want to see the top of the cabinet."

I obeyed and, on setting her down, saw her rush over to the Major and seize his cane.

"One nasty habit upset your scheme," she said. "You like to jab your stick viciously at people. Look at the tweed fabric behind Scoop's knee, where you probably poked him in Nardi's. Another round gob of tar, the kind used in resurfacing West 44th Street, is on your cane. You also left a dab high up on the wall, out of your sight, when you poked down the cloisonne box."

What would you do with a chick like that? I picked her up and kissed her.

"This isn't the time," she protested. "Listen, lug, didn't you accept money to get the Major in the headlines? Well, no reporters are here in the house. They're all out on the sidewalk. You've got a scoop, lug. Grab that hall phone and get your old newspaper job back!"

the amy waggoner murder case

by . . . Fredric Brown

He wanted no more talking —no more questions. I must keep still. He needed time to think before killing me.

IT WAS the first murder case I'd ever had a chance to work on, and I could easily have missed that chance if we'd known that it was a murder case when the call came in. Hetherton, my boss, always covered the important stories himself, such few important stories as break in a small town. I covered all the rest—which meant mostly church socials and the like. Exciting.

It was a little before five o'clock when the phone on Hetherton's desk rang and he picked it up, said, "Hetherton speaking," and then listened. Hetherton—Sidney M. Hetherton—is owner, publisher, editor and business manager of the Mayville (Arizona) *Weekly Sun.*

I didn't hear the next few things he said into the phone, if any, because just then I thought of my next sentence and resumed hammering on the keyboard of the old Underwood typewriter on the stand beside my desk.

I started to glance over what I'd just written for possible typos when Hetherton called out "Spitzer," and I looked over toward him and said, "Yes, Boss?"

Fredric Brown returns with this unusual story of murder in a small Arizona town. Brown, who is also well known in the SF field, is the author of the famous THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT, THE SCREAMING MIMI, *the more recent* THE LENIENT BEAST, *and other mystery novels, many laid in the Southwest.*

"Can you spare a few minutes, Spitzer?" he asked.

It was a rhetorical question. My time was his time. But I nodded to Hetherton that I could spare a few minutes.

He said, "That call was from Birdie Edwards. She's been trying to reach Chief McNulty by phone and can't get through. His line's been busy for half an hour. She asked if I'd send someone across the street to give him a message."

"Sure," I said. "What's the message?"

"She wants him to come out there right away. Not to phone her back, to come out."

That was simple enough. "Right," I said, and started for the door; then I turned back. I said, "If she's calling for the police, maybe it's a story. And it's getting close to deadline. Maybe I should go out with Mac, just in case."

He frowned, hesitated. "All right, but make it back as fast as you can."

Police headquarters, if you can call it that, is right across the main drag from the *Sun* office. It has two medium-sized rooms. The front room is the office. A barred door leads to the back room, which is the jail. Or it's what jail there is; in a larger town it would be called tank. Prisoners are seldom held there longer than overnight; they're usually drunks tossed in to sober up. If a felony is involved the prisoner is held there only until he can be taken to the county jail fifty miles away, for trial and imprisonment, if any. Mayville has no facilities for either of these. It has, of course, a Justice of the Peace who can handle traffic cases, drunks and the like. Whenever possible he metes out fines rather than sentences, even short ones. Fines help the town treasury; sentences hurt it.

When I went in McNulty was still or again on the telephone. I strolled over to the barred door and looked through it to see if anyone was in stir; the jail was empty. I sat down. I listened to enough of McNulty's conversation to deduce that he was arguing with his wife and not putting out an all-points bulletin on a bank robbery, and then I quit listening and waited.

McNulty is a good cop, as good a Chief of Police as a town the size of Mayville can expect to get for the salary it pays. He's a big man with a moderate bay window; he's somewhere in his late forties and has held the job for about ten years. He was born in Mayville and knows the place inside out. In his early twenties he went to Phoenix and got himself a job there as a rookie policeman. Fifteen years later he was still a policeman, if no longer a rookie, when Mayville's former Chief of Police had retired on account of age. McNulty still had friends and relatives in Mayville, including a brother on the

town council; he was given first chance at the job and grabbed it. McNulty was Chief because he had two policemen under him—or maybe I should call them deputies, since neither of them wore uniforms, nor did Mac himself.

One was Charlie Sanger, a tall slim character with pale blond hair and pale blue eyes, who dressed mostly like a cowboy and who had probably been one once. He talked slowly, almost in a drawl; he moved slowly, when there wasn't any reason to do otherwise; and most of the time he thought slowly. He took over headquarters evenings; McNulty held them down by day.

The other was a Mexican named Refugio Herrara, but better known as Chico. He seldom came to headquarters except to bring in a prisoner, and that wasn't often. He ran what Mayville called Mextown, the western part of town—the part that would have been across the tracks if there'd been any tracks; Mayville isn't on a railroad.

He put down the phone and his swivel chair creaked as he turned around to face me. "Well, Bob?"

I said, "Birdie Edwards wants you to go out there right away. She couldn't get you on the phone and called the paper."

"What's she want?"

"She talked to Hetherton, not to me. But I gather that she didn't say—just that she wanted you to come out, not to phone."

He frowned. "I'll call her first anyway." He picked up the phone again and gave the number of La Fonda Motel. Yes, I know that *la fonda* means "the hotel" in Spanish, which makes the name ridiculous—The Hotel Motel — when translated. But don't blame me; I didn't name it. I don't think Birdie Edwards did either; someone told me that had been its name when she'd moved to Mayville and bought it a few years before.

Birdie Edwards is a big, coarse middle-aged woman who looks for all the world like the madam of a bordello. And local rumor has it that that's exactly what she was, somewhere back east, before she'd come to Mayville. But ex-madam or not, most people liked her well enough—those who knew her, that is; she came into town very seldom.

I heard McNulty say, "Birdie? This is McNulty. What's the excitement? If it's something that can wait till tomorrow I'd a hell of a lot rather—"

She must have cut in on him there, for he broke off and listened a while. Then he said, "Okay, okay, I'll be out. I'll start in a few minutes. Charlie Sanger's just about due to relieve me and another few minutes won't matter; I'll come out as soon as he gets here."

He put down the phone and

swiveled around to face me again. "Probably nothing, but it could be something. You know Amy Waggoner?"

"Sure," I said. Anyone who spent any time at all in Mayville taverns knew Amy Waggoner, at least by sight. She'd been in town only about a month but she'd made a reputation already among—shall I call it Mayville's café society?—as the primest female lush they'd ever known.

"Well," McNulty said, "she stays at Birdie's motel. Her door's locked, key on the inside, and Birdie's hammered on the door and gets no answer. Birdie's afraid something's wrong with her, but she won't take the responsibility of breaking down the door herself, even if it's her motel. Says that's my job."

"Maybe she isn't in the room," I suggested. "The key being in the lock doesn't prove she is. Not with the kind of locks they have out there. They're snap locks that click when you close the door and if the key's on the inside and turned at the time, you can lock yourself out."

McNulty grunted. "Hell of a kind of lock for a motel. You'd think people would be locking themselves out all the time."

"Birdie told me it's happened only a few times. And those times the window was either open or unlocked; somebody just had to go through the window to open up from the inside. Amy Waggoner's window must be closed and locked, or Birdie wouldn't have called you."

He grunted again and looked past me toward the street. "Well, here comes Charlie. Tell Hetherton I'll give him a ring if it's anything serious. I know this is your press night."

I said, "Hetherton asked me to go along with you—if you don't mind."

McNulty frowned and I saw that he did mind and would rather go without me. But he said, "Okay, come on," as I knew he would when I made it Hetherton's idea that I should. A small town appointive official, no matter how long he's held his job and how well he's done in it, stays on the good side of the local editor.

He stopped to talk a moment to Charlie Sanger and then we got into his car and drove through town. The highway that goes on to Bisbee is the main drag through Mayville; the business district is spread along three blocks of it.

Just beyond the business district McNulty swung off the street and into the parking area of *The Lucky Lode,* one of Mayville's three downtown drinking spots—and the least reputable, or at least the noisiest by night, of the three. Mayville has five altogether but the other two are cantinas in Mextown.

He was already going through

the door and I followed him in and looked around. There were only a few customers and Amy wasn't among them.

We went up to the bar and Willie, the bartender, came over to us. "Hi, Mac. Hi, Bob."

McNulty asked him, "Amy been in yet today?"

Willie shrugged slender shoulders. "Dunno. Just came on duty. You could ask Perry; he ain't left yet. Back washing up. Having a drink?"

McNulty said, "A shot, little water on the side." He started back toward the door of the washroom.

Willie looked at me questioningly and I told him I'd have the same. I don't care for whiskey straight and would rather have had mine mixed with soda, but McNulty might be in a hurry to get going and I hate to have to gulp a highball down.

McNulty came back just as Willie finished pouring our drinks. He said, "No, she ain't been in. When did you see her last, Willie?"

"Last night, midnight maybe. Why? Something wrong?"

"Don't think so. Was she drunker'n usual?"

"Probably not even as drunk. Usually she stays till we close at one."

"She leave alone?"

Willie thought a minute. "I think so, Mac. But I wouldn't swear to it; we had a fair crowd and I was pretty busy. She said so long or good night or something when she started away from the bar, but I don't guess I actually saw her go out the door."

McNulty nodded. He picked up his drink and downed it and I downed mine. He said, "Come on, Bob," and turned from the bar. I reached for my wallet and brought it out, but Willie waved it away, and McNulty had made no move for a pocket.

I followed McNulty out and we got in his car. Pulling out of the parking area he asked, "How well do you know her?"

"To talk to," I said. "And I bought her a drink or two a couple of times—times when she wasn't lit up too brightly."

"She's still a good-looking dame, lush or not. Did you make any passes?"

"I didn't make any passes."

We were at La Fonda Motel by then and he turned the car into the driveway. Birdie Edwards was standing, her arms folded across her mountainous bosom, just outside the door of the unit that served her as office and living quarters.

La Fonda is an average small motel. It doesn't have a swimming pool or palm trees, but neither does it have cockroaches or bedbugs. It's far from new but Birdie keeps things in good repair and doesn't begrudge fresh paint when fresh paint is needed.

"You sure took your time, Mac," she told him.

"Now, Birdie. I had to wait till Charlie Sanger came in, like I told you. And we stopped at the *Lode* to make sure she wasn't there."

"*I* phoned there, before I started trying to get *you* on the phone. And Cass's and Ralph's."

McNulty sighed, getting out of the car. "Okay, Birdie. Anyway it's probably nothing. Just that she's drunk in there, that's all. But I'll push in the door if you want me to."

"She ain't just drunk in there. Or if she is it's the first time she ever got really drunk before dark."

She was already leading the way across the center area toward the door of the third unit, and we followed her. McNulty asked, "When did you see her last?"

"Yesterday, 'bout noon. When she usually gets up."

"You didn't hear her come home last night then? Or know if she was alone?"

We were in front of the door by then. There was a window beside the door, but drapes were pulled across it and you couldn't see in.

Birdie said, "No, I *didn't* hear her come home last night. And naturally I don't know if she came home alone or with a herd of pink elephants. Now, Mac McNulty, quit stalling and push in that door. If you hold the knob turned and just throw your shoulder against where the lock is you can probably snap the lock, it's a light one, without splintering the door."

"Okay, Birdie. But I'm going to knock once first, even if you did. She could of been asleep then, or out cold, and be conscious by now."

He knocked hard and called out, "Amy, you in there?"

He waited maybe half a minute and then held the knob turned, as Birdie had suggested, and threw his shoulder against the door. Not quite hard enough the first time, just right the second. The lock snapped and the door flew open; he almost fell into the room.

I was right behind him, before he could think to tell me to stay outside. And Birdie Edwards was right behind me.

It was a nice motel room, as motel rooms go, but we weren't noticing that.

Amy Waggoner was there all right. She was lying on her back just about in the middle of the double bed with a sheet—the only cover over her—pulled up not quite to her shoulders, which were bare.

She might have been asleep except for two things. Although her face was not distorted in any way, she didn't *look* asleep; she looked dead.

And there was a spot on the sheet a few inches in diameter

just about over her heart. The spot was reddish black, the color of dried blood.

McNulty swore. A few steps took him alongside the bed, while Birdie and I moved to the foot of the bed. Birdie's hand gripped my arm. So hard that it hurt. By no means all of Birdie's extra weight was fat; she had muscles too.

McNulty reached down and pulled back the sheet, pulled it back a lot farther than was necessary, almost down to Amy's knees. Her body was naked, and it was unmarked except for the single wound that had been right under where the center of the bloodstain on the sheet had been, and there was very little blood on her body, less really than there had been on the sheet, which had soaked up most of it. The wound was a small horizontal slit, about the size that would be made by a blade not much over half an inch wide.

Amy's body was surprisingly beautiful. I'd never seen her other than fully dressed. She didn't, or hadn't any time I'd seen her, wear shorts and a halter as many of the *touristas* and a few of the local women did. I hadn't thought particularly about her age; I'd assumed it to be somewhere in her thirties. But now I wondered. Her breasts were firm and gently rounded; so was the rest of her. Her body could have been that of a girl—a beautiful girl—no older than her early twenties.

What signs Amy had shown of being older than that had been in her face. And, oddly, now in the relaxation of death her face looked younger than I'd thought it was. It had not been an unattractive face, but there had been tension in it—the tension that drives an alcoholic or compulsive drinker to find release in liquor. Now the tension was gone from Amy's face; she hadn't been able to find peace in life, but she had found it in death.

McNulty cleared his throat. "A switch-knife," he said. "Or a knife about that size. Died instantly." I thought he was saying that because of the way she lay, perfectly relaxed with her arms at her sides. But he went on, "Or else there'd be more blood than that. From the way she's laying I'd say she got it while she was asleep or passed out and never knew what happened to her."

Birdie's grasp on my arm had relaxed a little but I had a feeling that I was going to have black and blue marks where her hand had been. Also she had her voice back, and it was indignant. "Mac McNulty, cover that woman up. It ain't decent."

"Now Birdie, she's dead. And I got to—"

He reached for Amy's wrist, tried to lift her arm. The whole

body moved slightly, but neither the elbow nor the shoulder gave in the slightest. He said, "Stiff as a board. Advanced rigor, well over twelve hours. She was killed sometime last night, not today. Well—"

He pulled the sheet back up over Amy, although he seemed a bit reluctant about it. He turned toward us. "Out, both of you," he said. "Me too. I'm going to phone the sheriff and get him in on this. We won't touch nothing more till he gets here."

He shooed us out ahead of him, pulled the door shut. Since the wood hadn't splintered and it fitted fairly tightly in the frame it stayed that way. He said, "I'm going to use your phone, Birdie. Don't open that door again, either of you." He walked across toward the patio toward the office, his feet crunching on gravel while he crossed the driveway and then silent on the grass.

Birdie made no move to follow him so I didn't either. Hearing him call Douglas for the sheriff wouldn't give me anything; a chance to talk to Birdie for a while might.

"Birdie," I said, "how well did you get to know Amy Waggoner?"

"She was friendly enough. But we never got close."

"She didn't do any work," I said. "At least not in the month she was here in Mayville. Know where her money came from?"

Birdie folded her arms. "I know what she told me—alimony. But I can't prove it because I never saw any of the checks. She paid me in cash."

"You gave her a weekly rate?"

"Yeah. She asked for one when she checked in, said she might be here quite a while. So it was already off season and I quoted her twenty-five. Then a little before the first week was up she started talking about saving money getting a room in town and I told her if she'd stay I'd drop it to twenty a week; that's what she paid since. That's pretty low but it's better than having the room empty, and I haven't had *all* the rooms filled since late March."

I said, "If she asked for a weekly rate right off then she expected to stay a while even when she first came. Did she ever say why? What it was that attracted her to Mayville? Not that it isn't a nice town but—you know what I mean."

Birdie shook her head. "I was curious myself, but she never gave me a clue. I couldn't just out and ask her."

"She didn't know anyone here before she came?"

"Not that she mentioned. But she must of *got* to know someone pretty well."

"What do you mean, Birdie?"

"I mean whoever killed her last night. Whether she came

home with him or let him in later, it must have started out as a pretty friendly call—from the way she's dressed."

I thought a moment. "Unless she forgot to lock her door and someone came in and stabbed her in her sleep. Do you happen to know if she slept naked? Ordinarily, I mean."

"At least some of the time she did. Happen to know that because one morning a couple weeks ago— Do you know Herbie Pembrook?"

I knew Herbie Pembrook all right. He wasn't exactly a village idiot but he was as close to one as Mayville had. He was thirty or thirty-five and probably had a mental age of twelve or thirteen. A moron, but able to support himself by doing odd jobs, mostly yard work.

"Well," Birdie said, "he was out here a couple weeks ago mowing the grass for me. Usually do that myself but I'd sprained an ankle and thought I ought to keep off it a few days. But anyway I happened to look out my window— Or, wait a minute, I didn't just happen to; it was because I hadn't heard the mower for a few minutes and I looked out to see if Herbie was goofing off. He was standing there looking in Amy Waggoner's window.

"I went out and told him to get back to his mowing and then went over and looked in the window to see what he'd been staring at—and it was plenty. Amy had forgot to pull her drapes and she was laying there on top of the covers naked as a jaybird. I had to wake her up and tell her to pull her drapes. Hell of a reputation this place would get if I let my guests turn it into a peep show."

McNulty was coming back toward us. He said, "Got the sheriff; he'll be starting right away, be here in an hour."

I said, "I'd better call Hetherton and give him a start on the story. We go to press tonight and it's almost six now."

"Okay, call him. But you stick around."

I'd started toward the motel office, but the tone of McNulty's voice made me turn back. I said, "Okay, Mac. I *want* to stick around. But why make it an order?"

" 'Cause I haven't questioned you yet, want to do it after the sheriff gets here. You and Birdie are the main witnesses so far."

I shrugged and said okay; after all I *wanted* to stick around, so why was I making a point of it? If Mac wanted to think I was a suspect, let him think so. But thinking of suspects made me remember what Birdie had just been telling me about Herbie Pembrook.

I said, "Birdie, tell Mac what you just told me about Amy's peep show—and about Herbie seeing it."

She was starting the story as I walked toward the office.

I called the *Sun* and Hetherton's stiff voice answered. I said, "Spitzer,. calling from Birdie's office. It's a story all right. Amy Waggoner was murdered, last night or early this morning. Want to take some notes?"

"No. You come in and write up what you've got. If it's a murder I'll go out and cover it. Come in right away."

"Mac won't let me, says I should stay till the sheriff gets here, for questioning. He seems to think I'm a suspect."

Hetherton snorted, or made a noise as near a snort as is possible for a man as stiff as he is. "Tell McNulty I ordered you to come in. If he doesn't like it, have him call me. That's an order, Spitzer."

I went back to McNulty and Birdie, and told Mac what Hetherton had said. He snorted too—a real snort, not a well-bred one. But he said, "Okay, we can question you later. Beat it." And then he relented and reached into his pocket, pulled out his car keys and handed them to me. "Take my car. I'll ride in with the sheriff."

I thanked him and went to his car. Driving in, I was tempted to stop at the *Lode* for another drink and to ask a lot more questions, now that I knew it hadn't been a false alarm about Amy, but McNulty would probably find out about it when he did his own questioning at the *Lode*. So I drove straight in, parked the car and went into the *Sun*.

Hetherton was at his desk, dressed meticulously in a suit coat, white shirt with a stiff collar and a tie. The costume he wore year round, in the office and out, even in the hundred and ten degree heat of summer. I'd started out dressing that way myself until I'd learned that almost everyone else in Mayville dressed comfortably in hot or even warm weather.

"How was she killed?"

I told him that, and the few other things I'd learned.

He nodded. "Write it up. Except about Herbie Pembrook. He's harmless and it doesn't mean anything that he looked in her window once. That was Mrs. Waggoner's fault, not his."

I didn't want to argue with him so I said, "Okay. What about Bisbee? Shall I phone Tom Acres?"

"Yes, but write the story first."

The *Sun* has an arrangement with the Bisbee daily paper, the *Gazette,* and with Tom Acres, its managing editor. The *Sun* has no teletype and, since over ninety percent of our coverage is local, it gets by without one because of the arrangement. When anything happens in Mayville important enough for the Bisbee paper to want it we phone Tom and give him the story. He uses

it and if it's important enough to rate coverage elsewhere he puts it on the teletype. When a story breaks elsewhere that he knows we want to cover he telephones us—if, that is, the story breaks on a Thursday, our press day; otherwise we've already got it from our exchanges, including of course his paper. When we give him something we phone him collect; when he gives us something he phones us collect. I don't know whether any money changes hands on the arrangement but I doubt it. We give Tom Acres about as much as we get from him.

I knocked out the story and read it over, decided I'd done a good job on it. I took the original back to Waldo—the one of our two printers who runs the Linotype; the other does hand composition and most of the press work—I went back to my desk and picked up the phone.

Two minutes later I got Tom. I gave him the story, simply reading what I'd just written but slowly enough so he could take notes. Once in a while too slowly; he'd say "Okay, go on." Of course the Bisbee paper wouldn't want as full coverage as we'd give the story.

When I finished he said, "Good boy, Bob. You write that?"

"Yes, but I'm off the story now. The brass is taking over."

"How *is* the brass?"

"Still healthy, damn it."

"Tough. Well, you know when we go to press. If there's any important development in the case, call me back. I'll put this much on the tele meanwhile. Only it's too good a story—how do you expect to get fired, writing that well?"

"I don't," I said gloomily. "So long, Tom."

I hung up and went back to work. I had plenty of it to do. I dug up my notes on last night's school board meeting and ran paper into my typewriter. (I hadn't attended the meeting but I'd seen the secretary this morning and had taken my notes from the notes she'd taken for the minutes.)

So I hammered out the story, getting in as many names as I possibly could without actually giving the attendance list. That was one thing Hetherton had taught me, practically with a blacksnake whip, the first week I'd worked for him. "Use names, Spitzer, names! People want to see their own names, or their wives' names, in the paper. That's the *raison d'être* of a small town weekly."

I finished the school board story just in time to trade it for the galley proof on the Waggoner story Waldo brought me. I read the galley and marked a couple of typos, then put it on Hetherton's desk. I knocked out a couple more stories, shorter

ones, and took them back to him. Then I looked up at the clock; it was seven forty-five and I hoped he'd come in soon or at least phone in, or we might be even later getting to press than I'd feared.

He came in.

He sat down at his desk and read the galley proof of my story. He marked it up a bit with a copy pencil and held it out to me. "Waldo," he said.

I took it back, looking as I walked, to see what the marks were. Nothing much. But I saw he'd changed the word "naked" to "nude"; he had a point there and I made a mental note.

When I came back he had paper in his machine and was typing. I could read the slug-line "ADD ONE—WAGGONER," but, without leaning over his shoulder, not any more of it.

"Spitzer," he said, "Mac and the sheriff are over across the street now and he still wants to talk to you. Might as well get it over with. But don't stay any longer than you have to."

"Sure," I said and turned to go.

"Wait, Spitzer. Let McNulty interrogate you, but don't leave without reciprocating. Something new may have come up."

"Okay," I said, "but you'd better, in that case, tell me what you're putting in that add to my story. If I don't know what you've got, I won't know what's new and what isn't."

He frowned, but saw that I had a point. He said, "As soon as the sheriff got there he and McNulty searched Amy's room. Apparently the murderer had beaten them to that job last night. Amy's wallet—Birdie said she carried one—was missing from her handbag. Her drawers and suitcases had been searched too. They looked especially for any letters or papers that might give them a street address in Kansas City. There wasn't a scrap of paper in the place, not even a used envelope in the wastebasket."

"That's all?"

"One other thing. There was an almost empty quart of Seagram's Seven on the floor by the bed—on the far side; that's why you wouldn't have noticed it. Birdie swears Amy wasn't a solitary drinker, that she'd never found a bottle, full or empty, in her room."

I said, "So the picture is that her guest brought the bottle and drank with her till she passed out. Then killed her and searched the room. How about glasses?"

"Two had been used. But they were both on the dresser and had been wiped off on the outside. So had the bottle. The killer knew about fingerprints."

"Which means they won't find them anywhere else either. Where's the body? Are they going to have an autopsy?"

"The body's at Murcheson's Mortuary. There'll be an autopsy, probably tomorrow. But they haven't decided yet whether to have the coroner come here or to take the body to Douglas. And that's all. Get going, Spitzer. I want you back here as soon as possible."

Outside, I stood a few seconds wondering whether to eat before or after I saw McNulty, and eating won. When I left the restaurant I crossed the street and went to police headquarters.

McNulty was at his desk, talking on the telephone. He was saying, "No, damn it, I can't even *try* to guess when I'll be home." So I knew he was talking to his wife again.

The sheriff of Cochise County sat alongside the desk. He waved a cigar at me as I came in and said, "Hi, Bob," and I said, "Hi, Sheriff." The sheriff of Cochise County, modern style, doesn't at all resemble the typical sheriff in a Western movie or television show, except in that he does wear a ten-gallon Stetson, a beautiful white one that must have cost plenty. Otherwise he dressed like a businessman and he did not wear a six shooter. Charlie Sanger was sitting over in the far corner of the room, his feet up on the table, reading a Western magazine.

McNulty put down the receiver. "Damn all women," he said to nobody in particular, and then to me, "sit down. This may take a while."

I didn't see why it should but I pulled up a chair. I said, "Before you start the third degree, Mac, I've got a suggestion and I'd better make it before I might forget. You're still looking for a Kansas City address for Amy?"

"Yeah. Damn funny there wasn't *something* in her room. Unless the guy took it."

"Did he take her car keys?"

"Nope. I've got 'em. Why?"

"There's probably a registration slip on the steering post of her car. Besides that, some people carry papers in the glove compartment. Did you search the car?"

McNulty snapped his fingers. "Didn't think of it. Good idea, Charlie!"

Charlie must have been listening despite the magazine for he was already ambling across the room. "Want me to go look, Mac?"

"Right away." McNulty reached into his pocket, took out a small leather key case of the size that holds just the pair of keys to a car and tossed it to Charlie. "Walk over there so you can drive the car back and put it on the lot behind here where it's handy. No use leaving it out there."

McNulty turned back to me. "Look, I'll start with some of the same questions I asked you before account the sheriff wasn't

here when you answered 'em. Okay. You came here from Kansas City, about a year ago?"

"Right. Within a week of being exactly a year ago."

"How long had you lived there?"

"I was born there. Lived there all my life except for four years —five counting the year I've been here. I was away two years at college, Ohio State, and right after that two years in the army, mostly in Texas. I got out of the army four years ago."

"And went back to Kansas City and stayed there till you came here?"

"Right."

"But you didn't know Amy Waggoner there? Even casually?"

"No. I never saw her before she came to Mayville."

"How did you meet her?"

"I was introduced to her."

"Who by? Tell us about it."

I said, "It was a Sunday afternoon—let's see, since she's been here a month it would have been four weeks ago this coming Sunday. I was wandering around town and dropped in at the *Lode*. Willie Perkovich was behind the bar and Amy in front of it. There were a few other customers but not many.

"When I went in Willie and Amy were talking. He motioned me over. He said, 'Like to have you meet someone from your old home town, Bob. This is—' Then he couldn't remember her name, if he knew it, and she gave it and I gave the rest of mine. So naturally I ordered a drink for her when I ordered for myself. Guess we talked about half an hour, and then I left."

"What did she tell you about herself?"

"Not much. That she was from Kansas City but probably wasn't going back there. That she'd started out heading west, probably to California, but that she liked Mayville and might stay a while. Even indefinitely. She asked a lot of questions about the town and I answered them. Climate and what-not."

"Did you talk about Kansas City?"

"Not much if any that first time. But the next time I saw her —to talk to, that is; I'm not counting passing her on the street and saying hello—was in Cass's bar, about a week later. Just a week, come to think of it, because it was a Sunday afternoon too. And that time we talked mostly about Kansas City."

"You'd say she really came from there? I mean—"

I said, "I know what you mean. And yes, she really came from there—or had spent quite a bit of time there, not just traveled through. For instance, when I mentioned I lived near Ashland Square, she knew where it was, mentioned some other places nearby. And when we got to talk-

ing about downtown stores and bars, she mentioned some I'd forgotten. Yes, she'd lived in Kansas City, and I'd say recently; her memory of it was fresher than mine is, after a year."

"Talk to her any other times?"

"Come to think of it, I guess those were the only times I talked to her tête-a-tête. I mean, just the two of us."

"Was she drunk these times?"

"Neither of the two times I talked to her alone."

McNulty sighed. "Well—Now about last night. What did you do?"

"Behaved myself. Ate right after I quit work and went home. Spent the evening in my room reading and went to bed and to sleep a little after ten. I always try to get a good night's sleep on Wednesday nights, because of Thursday, today, being our tough day. Wait, I lied. I had one drink with Cass, after eating and before I went home. That would have been between half past six and seven."

"Was Amy there?"

I shook my head. "I didn't see Amy any time yesterday. And I thought you knew Amy wasn't welcome at Cass's in the evening. He doesn't like people to get drunk in his place."

"Don't suppose you can prove you spent the evening, and the night, in your room. Let's see, you room with Mrs. Burdock, don't you?"

"Yes to your second question. No to your first—after ten o'clock. Mrs. B. knows I got home a little after seven—or thereabouts—because I stopped and talked to her then. And at about half past nine she knocked on my door and said she'd made some cocoa and did I want a cup. I did because, like I said, I wanted to get to sleep early, and hot cocoa always makes me sleepy. We drank cocoa and talked till about ten, then I went upstairs and turned in. I guess she turned in too; that's her usual bedtime.

"Okay. Now, how come you knew that business of how it's possible at Birdie's to lock yourself out with the key on the inside? *I* didn't know that, and I doubt if many people in Mayville do, since you said it happened only a few times."

So *that* was what had been eating McNulty, a little thing like that. I grinned. "Because I'm one of the few people it happened to. When I came here a year ago to take the *Sun* job, I stayed at Birdie's for my first three days, while I was looking for a room in town. No sweat in my case because I hadn't locked the window. If you doubt me, check with Birdie; she'll remember it."

McNulty grunted. "Didn't know you that soon, didn't know you'd stayed there. So that don't mean anything, but — there's something I've been wondering

about you for quite a while. Maybe you can straighten me out on it. First, how old are you?"

"Twenty-nine," I said.

"About what I'd have guessed. And how much is Hetherton paying you."

I sighed, seeing what was coming. I said, "Thirty-five a week."

"About what I'd guessed too. About what he usually pays. And up to now, up till you came, he's never been able to get or keep a good reporter before.

"But here you are a smart feller, educated—two years of college you just mentioned—twenty-nine years old. And taking and hanging on to a job like that. It don't make sense; you ought to be able to get twice that much from any newspaper around — hell, soda fountain clerks make more than that these days. Unless you're hiding out here from the law, or unless Hetherton's *got* something on you—damn, I don't get it."

So I told McNulty, and the sheriff too since he was there, what had happened.

My father had died when I was starting my third year at Ohio State. The bank my father had worked for offered me a job as assistant teller and I took it.

I managed to hold the job all of two months before my draft board got around to realizing that I no longer had an educational deferment and started breathing down my neck. I decided to humor them, since I had no choice, and let them draft me.

After my hitch, I went back to Kansas City and my little cage at the bank. I didn't *like* banking, but apparently I did all right; I kept getting small raises and at the end of two years I was a teller instead of an assistant teller.

I had a friend named Rod Cameron, about my age, who was a reporter on the Kansas City *Times*. One evening the two of us were drinking beer and having a bull session in his room and I got to bitching about the horrors of life in a teller's cage and the dullness of banking in general.

He said, "If you don't like banking why don't you get out of it while you can. What would you rather be than a bank teller?"

"A reporter," I said. I didn't have to hesitate; I'd always envied his job, although we were both making the same amount of money. "But it can't be done. Newspapers don't hire inexperienced people as reporters."

He nodded. "You're right, about city newspapers. But small town newspapers sometimes have trouble getting good men and are not so fussy. Of course you'd have to start for a hell of a lot less than you're making now, Bob, but if you've got any talent for it at all it shouldn't take you long to be in a decent job again."

"How long would it take?"

"I wouldn't guess—it would

depend too much on how good you are and how hard you work. But listen, are you serious about this?"

I said, "I'm serious. But how'd I go about it?"

"Run a classified ad in the *Editor and Publisher,* trade magazine for editors. Not too short an ad, make it long enough to sell yourself, but be honest about your age and inexperience. But don't forget the two years of college either; small town papers don't get too many men with even half of a college education."

The ad brought two replies.

The second was from a Sidney M. Hetherton, editor and publisher of a weekly paper in Mayville, Arizona. He offered me thirty-five dollars a week provided I'd be willing, as the ad I'd run had stated, to work a reasonable length of time for that salary, since, as he said frankly, I'd be of little if any value to him at first. I'd be the only reporter.

The salary wasn't much worse than what I'd figured on having to start for.

I looked up Mayville in an atlas. The population was given as around two and a half thousand, a little small for my taste. But I wouldn't be there long. And when I looked it up on the map in the atlas I found it was within an hour's drive of Bisbee and not much farther from Douglas, both fair sized towns and close enough to drive to for an evening any time I found myself bored in Mayville.

I took only about an hour to make up my mind and then I sent Sidney M. Hetherton a telegram accepting his offer and telling him that I'd have to give a week's notice on my present job and then drive out, that I'd be there in about ten days.

And exactly ten days later, early in the afternoon, I drove into Mayville. Before going all the way into town I checked into a motel—La Fonda Motel—mostly because I'd worn old clothes for driving and wanted to clean up and change. From there to the *Sun.* The office, with print shop in back, was about what I'd expected. It was no dirtier and no cleaner than most small town weekly offices.

Hetherton, though, was at least cleaner and more dapper than most small town editors. He was somewhere near fifty and a bantamweight, about five feet five and certainly not heavier than a hundred twenty pounds. He had hair graying at the temples and thinning on top but very neatly combed. He wore gold-rimmed bifocals. I neither liked nor disliked him at sight. His manner was dry and crisp but not unfriendly—during that first interview.

He took me around, showed me what there was to show. In the print shop behind the parti-

tion in about the middle of the shop he introduced me to the two printers.

Then Hetherton sat down at his own desk and put me in a chair across from it. He said, "This is the establishment, Mr. Spitzer. Small, yes. But that's an advantage under your circumstances. You'll learn faster because your work will be more diversified. I regret that thirty-five is all I can offer you, but of course I don't expect you to stay forever at that salary. But it's a fair salary for someone just learning the business and your advertisement stated you would be willing to agree, to promise, to stay with me a reasonable length of time. I'd say two years is fair, wouldn't you?"

"Two years?"

"That is exactly what I mean."

"I didn't have any such period as that in mind when I worded my ad. A year is the most I could possibly agree to stay, at that salary."

"*I* consider two years reasonable under the circumstances. You may have the job if you wish, but if you accept it I expect your unqualified promise not to force me to fire you by any deliberate—what is the phrase I want—ah, I have it by any deliberate misfeasance, malfeasance or nonfeasance in your job."

"How much time do I have to think this over? Do I have to say yes or no right now?"

He pulled out a pocket watch and looked at it. "I'd like to know by closing time, five o'clock. It's half past two now. Is that time enough?"

"Yes," I said. "I'll let you know by then."

And walked out. Into a beautiful warm and sunny afternoon. Mayville in May. It's possibly the best month of the year in southern Arizona. True, the tourist season is over by then, but that's because most tourists come here to escape cold and snow in their own home states and May is a beautiful month almost everywhere.

I took off my suit coat and put it in my car, but left the car where it was, and walked. I walked all around the town and I liked it, despite my disappointment and my indecision. It seemed like a nice town, an honest town.

I stopped in a cantina and ordered a tequila, then, realizing that there were only two other customers in the place, I added "por la casa." Which, according to what was left of my high school Spanish, is a literal translation of "for the house." Probably the Spanish idiom for "for the house" is quite different, but the bartender got the idea. And gave me change from the dollar I put on the bar. Of course it turned out that both the other customers as well as the proprietor spoke English, and I couldn't

escape until each of them had bought back drinks for me.

Three tequilas put a warm spot inside me and made Mayville look even better. I circled back and found myself on the main street again, half a block from the newspaper office. It was four o'clock and I still hadn't made up my mind.

I was in front of a tavern and the sign on it read: *THE BAR SINISTER.* I didn't try to resist; I wanted to meet anyone who had the guts to name his bar *THE BAR SINISTER.* I went in.

And I met Cass Phillips. There didn't happen to be any other customers and Cass and I got to talking; we were on a first name basis within a few minutes. Cass loved to talk; we talked about anything and everything, except that I didn't confide my problem to him and cry on his shoulder, as I was tempted to.

A big man, Cass. At least six feet tall and with broad shoulders, a chest like a barrel. Thick iron-gray hair that could have been prematurely gray, since otherwise he could easily have passed for forty. And he was—although I didn't learn this all at once that first afternoon—surprisingly cosmopolitan and intelligent to own and operate a bar—even a *Bar Sinister*—in a town as small as Mayville. He'd been a singing waiter in Chicago, he'd been croupier on a roulette wheel in Las Vegas, he'd been—well, you name it and he'd been it.

I looked at my watch and saw that it was half past four. I'd stretched one drink half an hour and had time for one more. I said, "One more, Cass. One more drink, I mean—" And since we'd been so friendly I added, "And have one yourself."

"Thanks, not now," he said. And added apologetically, "I usually have a few when it gets near closing time, but never this early." Before he reached for my glass he fished change out of his pocket and found one nickel, pushed it to me across the bar. "Put it in the juke box. Number twelve maybe, unless you see something you like better."

I hate juke boxes, but I couldn't right then be impolite and say so, especially as it was his nickel. I got off my stool and went back to the box. Number twelve was *Come Back to Sorrento,* which is pretty good fare for a juke box; at least it wasn't rock and roll or a singing cowboy. It seemed to be instrumental, not vocal, so I settled for it and pushed the button. While the mechanism started working I looked at the other numbers. And was surprised, almost amazed, at the quality of them. Few of them were deep classical, but it was all *good* music, mostly light classics or semi-classics. A few were popular, but they were good popular numbers like *Night and Day* and *Stardust.*

Most of them were instrumental only, as was *Come Back to Sorrento.*

Which now started to play and gave me my second surprise by not blaring out at me; it was soft, background music, and it sounded like hi-fi, or close to it. Then I got my third surprise as the introductory bars ended and a voice came in. But not from the juke box, from behind me.

"Guardail mare comé bello!
Spira tanto sentimento,
Comeil tuo soave accento . . ."

And what a voice. A big, powerful baritone, as smooth and beautiful as the melody it was singing. A natural voice, as Caruso's had been.

It was not, I came to realize later, quite as big a voice as I thought on first hearing it; it would hardly have filled a concert hall. But in a room no larger than *The Bar Sinister*—my God! I sat down in front of the drink that was waiting for me and listened reverently. I didn't even take a sip of my drink until he'd finished with:

"Torna a Sorrento,
Non farmi morir!"

and the juke box clicked off.

I said, "Beautiful," and meant it. "Do you do that often?"

"As often as anyone wants to listen. I like to sing."

I looked down at my glass and it was empty. But some other customers had just come in and Cass moved down the bar to serve them. I looked at my watch and saw that it was four-fifty. I had a few minutes, only a few minutes, to make up my mind.

I wanted to stay in Mayville. It wasn't just the effect of two highballs on top of three tequilas. It wasn't just the warmth and beauty of an Arizona afternoon in May. It wasn't just *The Bar Sinister* and Cass and Cass's voice. It wasn't just the atmosphere of the town itself, the fact that it seemed (Hetherton excepted) as honest and friendly a town as I'd ever seen. It wasn't any one of these things; it was all of them put together. I wanted to stay here, if I could.

I wandered out of Cass's and to the *Sun* office. I went up to Hetherton's desk. I said, "I'll take the job. And promise to do my best at it for two years."

He nodded coldly. "Be in at eight tomorrow morning, Spitzer."

Not "Mr. Spitzer," you'll notice. Not ever again. Nor Robert or Bob. From then on I was Spitzer to him.

But by the end of a month I was getting into the swing of things and by the end of three months I *knew* I was doing well and earning my salary.

By the end of six months I realized how badly I was hooked, for by then I was probably as good a reporter as Hetherton had ever

had. I could do anything he himself could do, and better and faster. On the editorial side, that is; I didn't know anything about the business end, but I couldn't have cared less. Reporting was what I'd set out to do.

What made things worse in one way, although better in another, was that about that time I met Tom Acres, managing editor of the Bisbee daily; not only met him but became quite friendly with him.

And one evening—I'd served about ten months of my sentence with Hetherton and had fourteen months to go—Tom propositioned me.

And now, two months later, I finished explaining to McNulty and the sheriff, just enough to answer McNulty's question, and to clear the air.

Apparently it did clear it. McNulty's voice was friendlier than it had been for a long time. He must have been wondering about me for a long time. But all he said was, "Guess that covers it," and then looked at the sheriff. "Doesn't it? Any other questions you want to ask?"

The sheriff shook his head, and then had a second thought. "Except this; keep thinking about those conversations you had with Amy. You might remember some little thing that would give us a lead."

I said, "Sure, I'll keep thinking. By the way, Mac, Hetherton told me to ask you if anything new has come up."

"Nope. What time you go to press?"

"Usually by ten. Tonight it may be later."

"Okay. We'll be here a hell of a lot later than that. I'll call you if anything important breaks."

"Fine," I said. I started for the door but before I reached it Charlie Sanger came in so I stepped aside and turned back. He went over to McNulty's desk and put something down on it. He said, "Well, we got an address, Mac. Driver's license."

I walked around the desk and looked over McNulty's shoulder while he was studying it. It was a Missouri license in a leatherette case with a celluloid front. Mrs. Amy Waggoner, 712 Olive Street, Kansas City, Mo. And the description fitted—5'5", 124 lbs., blonde hair, blue eyes. Her age, 35, surprised me a little; it's about the guess I'd have made from her face, but her body had looked so much younger than that.

"Good," McNulty said, "now that we got an address I'll phone K. C. tonight, right now." He reached for the phone but pulled his hand back and looked up at Charlie Sanger. "Anything else?"

"Nothing in the trunk. Some other stuff in the glove compartment but nothing important."

"Go bring the stuff in anyway. We'll look it over." He turned and spoke over his shoulder to

me. "That address mean anything to you, Bob?"

I said, "Nothing specific. It'd be near downtown and I think it's a rooming house neighborhood."

He nodded and reached for the phone again, and I followed Charlie out. If McNulty got anything from Kansas City tonight it would be on a call-back later and I'd better not wait. Hetherton would probably be having kittens already over how long I'd been gone.

He wasn't having kittens, but he glared at me when I came in. "Anything new?"

I started to tell him about the driver's license, but he said curtly, "Write it up."

I wrote my add, showed it to him and let him change two words, and then took it back to the Linotype. And then when I came back I said, "Those adds you wrote and that one, are all since I called Bisbee. Want me to call again?"

"No. He won't give it over eight inches anyway and he's got enough for that."

But when I sat down at my desk he changed his mind. "Yes, call Acres. Give him those adds. While you're talking to him ask him if he's got anything for us."

I wanted to grin because that was the tip-off on his real reason for telling me to make the call. He was trying to save a buck. Since our call would be collect any story Tom gave us would be on his phone bill and not on ours.

I batted out the story and took it to Hetherton. He was just finishing one of his own. He said, "I'll take these back. And I guess that's all—we're through earlier than I'd guessed—unless there's something new on the murder. You can go now, Spitzer."

I went. On press evenings I'm free as soon as the paper is being put to bed. Hetherton stays a little longer, until the first few copies are off the press.

I headed for Cass's. I always stopped there on Thursday night for a nightcap. After the hours I put in on a Thursday I figured I'd earned one by then. And a little quiet conversation and some music if Cass was in the mood and not too busy.

There were people in Cass's, two couples in one booth, one couple in another, none of them people I knew. But no one was at the bar and I sat down there as always. Cass was coming back from a booth and said, "With you in a minute," and then rang up the sale and took them back their change.

When he came back he made a highball and put it in front of me. "Anything new on Amy Waggoner, Bob?" he asked.

"Nothing important. How up to date are you?"

"Several people have talked about it in here, and Mac dropped in and asked me how much I

knew about her and I told him—which wasn't much. I guess I know the score up to a couple of hours ago."

"There's nothing much since then, Cass," I told him.

"Do they think somebody from around here killed her?"

I shrugged. "Not enough to work on yet. If they find anyone local who's been intimate with her, he's going to be a suspect. Are you sure she was living on alimony by the way? Did she tell you so?"

"She didn't say exactly that she was living on it, but she was getting some. About the second time she was ever in here she asked me if I'd cash a check for her. Said it wasn't a personal check, it was a lawyer's check for alimony. I told her I was low in the register and told her where the bank was. I guess she took it there."

"You didn't see the check?"

"No, or even ask her how much it was. The register *was* low, even if the check was small I'd have had to short myself on change to cover it." He sighed and looked up at the clock on the wall. "Well, guess it's late enough for me to have my first of the day. You about ready for another one?"

I looked and saw I'd killed two-thirds of my highball. But I said, "I'd better nurse this a while."

In the backbar mirror I saw that the party of four, the two couples, were getting up from the booth and heading for the door. Cass called a good night to them and got some good nights back. When they'd left he got their glasses from the booth and put them in the water under the bar.

I decided I was ready for my second drink and Cass made it. Just as he was ringing up for it Hetherton came in.

He took a stool at the bar. Not next to mine, but he did nod to me.

He even said hello to Cass. After all, Cass is an advertiser and Hetherton's always as cordial to advertisers as his nature permits.

Cass poured Hetherton's drink for him, a double on the rocks. It was always the same so Cass never had to ask what he wanted. Hetherton isn't a drinking man. As far as I'd ever seen he took exactly one drink per week, that double on the rocks every Thursday evening after the presses were running. But he made a rite out of that one drink even though he never spent more than ten minutes drinking it.

So was the giving of the papers a rite. He always brought three fresh, still inky papers with him, gave one to Cass and one to me if I was still at Cass's when he came in; I don't know what he did with it the times he didn't find me still there. He gave them to us now and we both said thanks. I put mine in my pocket and Cass put his on the backbar.

Ten minutes later Hetherton left.

He's never much of a conversationalist but tonight he'd outdone himself; he hadn't spoken a word since his hello to Cass. Now he said good night, but he was almost through the door before he thought of it.

And a little while after that the couple in the other booth left and Cass and I had the place to ourselves. I nodded toward the newspaper he'd put on the backbar. I said, "Cass, you're curious to read that paper, aren't you? About Amy, I mean. Well, go ahead if you want to; don't mind me."

He said, "I can wait. What do the details matter. I'd rather talk—"

He didn't finish because some more customers came in and he had to go to wait on them.

A minute later Charlie Sanger came in. "Hi, Bob, how's it go?"

Cass came over and Charlie asked him for three cold bottles of beer to go, and I said good night to both of them and left.

I woke to broad daylight and knocking on my door. Mrs. Burdock's voice called out, "Bob! You awake? Long distance call for you."

"Be right there," I called back. And scrambled for a bathrobe and slippers. Who the hell, I wondered, could possibly be calling me long distance on my day off? I went downstairs to the phone and sat down by it, picked it up. "Bob Spitzer," I said.

"You don't sound like it." It was Tom Acres' voice. "Did I wake you up?"

"No," I said. "What the hell time is it?"

"Ten o'clock. Want to give you a one-day job, if you'll take it. Listen, Bob, all the state papers picked up that Waggoner story, all of it that I put on the wire. And some outside the state. Killings are a dime a dozen but a mystery murder gets coverage.

"And everybody wants more. And I've got to have a follow-up story for my own paper tonight, whether there's a break in the case or not. I haven't got anyone I can spare to send up there today and I know Hetherton's not going to do anything on the case now till time for his next week's paper. So how's about you? Want to be queen for a day, and handle it for me?"

"Sure," I said.

"Good boy. Spend the day on it and get me as much as you can before my deadline tonight. We'll worry about how much I pay you when we see what you get me. But a minimum of ten bucks even if you don't get anything worth printing."

"Fine," I said. "How much if I crack the case and find the murderer?"

"We'll worry about that if it happens. Listen, I can bring you up to date with one report we got

from Douglas already this morning. Sheriff got back there in the middle of the night and took the body with him. They're going to do an autopsy there sometime this morning, may be working on it now. If you phone him or the coroner early this afternoon you'll get the findings. I could do that from here, but you might as well do it and get everything into one story."

"Will do. Anything else?"

"Nope. Just wake up and get going. So long."

"Thanks, Tom," I said, and hung up the phone. Mrs. Burdock looked out of the kitchen door at the end of the passage.

"Cup of coffee, Bob? I've got some ready."

"Sounds good," I told her. "But will it keep till I get some clothes on?"

"Of course."

I headed for my room.

Mrs. Burdock must have heard me coming down the stairs, soon afterwards, because she had the coffee poured for me when I walked into the kitchen. And a cup for herself; she sat down across the table from me.

She said, "That poor Mrs. Waggoner. I just read about it in the paper. It's awful. Did you write the story, Bob?"

"Most of it."

"I hope they find the murderer. A woman isn't safe alone these days. That's why I always like to have at least one roomer, so there's a man around the house. Did you know this Mrs. Waggoner? Personally, I mean."

"I knew her slightly, talked to her a few times."

"She should never have stayed out at that Birdie Edwards' place."

I smiled. "Do you believe the rumors about Birdie, Mrs. Burdock? About what she used to be, I mean."

"I don't know her past, and I don't care about it. But I know what she is now. Coarse. And she's a snoop too. She goes through the luggage of people who stay there—stay there long enough, that is. Of course if they just stay overnight and leave the next day she doesn't have a chance to. Did she go through your stuff while you stayed there?"

I said, "Not that I know of."

"Well, she probably did. People *have* noticed it, and complained. She's a snoop and has to know everything she can about whoever stays there. You can't tell me she didn't go through Mrs. Waggoner's things, with her staying there a month. And you can't tell me she doesn't know a lot more about Mrs. Waggoner than she told."

"Could be," I said. "But if Amy didn't keep any papers in her room, what could she have learned? Of any importance to the investigation, I mean. It wouldn't help McNulty to know how often Amy changed her lingerie or how

long a tube of toothpaste lasted her."

"Everybody has *some* papers, Bob. If she was getting alimony she'd certainly keep a copy of the divorce agreement. And she'd certainly have a copy of the bill of sale on her car—otherwise how could she get a license for it every year, let alone ever sell it or trade it in? Another cup of coffee, Bob?"

"Are you sure the story about Birdie's snooping in her guests' rooms isn't just gossip?"

"No, there's been proof at least once. A case came up about a year ago—no, a little longer than that because it was before you came here. A man stayed at Birdie's a few nights and then she told him he couldn't have the room any more, that he'd have to leave. He demanded to know why and she said it was because he had two guns, pistols, and she wouldn't stand for any guns around her place. I guess she thought he might be a criminal.

"He moved in to the hotel, but then he went right to Mr. McNulty and put in a complaint about Birdie. The guns had been in a suitcase—not a locked one, but still he'd never had it open while he was there and Birdie couldn't possibly have known about them without having searched his luggage.

"And he wasn't a robber; he was a perfectly respectable tourist. He happened to like target shooting and had brought his guns along in case he stopped where a pistol range was handy and he had a chance to do some shooting."

"Did McNulty do anything about it?"

"What could he do? The man admitted nothing was missing. Oh, he bawled Birdie out, but you can't tell me that would change Birdie any, except to make her more careful."

"Umm," I said. "So if Birdie *did* see any papers of Amy's that have disappeared subsequently, she couldn't very well admit it so she could describe them."

"And you can't tell me she didn't look through Mrs. Waggoner's things. Mrs. Waggoner was kind of a mystery woman—people wondered why she'd come here and why she stayed on. Birdie would have been twice as curious about her as about most people who stay there."

That made sense, I thought. I wondered if Birdie might talk freely to me if I talked to her alone. Probably not, because she'd know that if she told me anything important I'd have to tell McNulty and he'd guess where the information came from.

I finished my second cup of coffee, thanked Mrs. Burdock, and left.

At police headquarters I found McNulty alone, sitting at his desk and doing nothing, unless he was thinking.

I said, "Hi, Mac. Anything new on Amy?"

"Not much. Right now I'm waiting for a couple of long distance calls and then maybe I'll have something."

"One of them from Kansas City?"

"No, I got that one. Know a little more about her now, but nothing that seems to fit in or be helpful. One of the calls I'm waiting for is from Douglas, about the autopsy. Other's from Seattle. We got the name and address of her ex-husband there. I called the police there; they'll check up on him and call me back."

"You got his name and address from Kansas City?"

"Nope. Got it right here, even before the K. C. call came. Head teller at the bank remembers Amy all right. She didn't open an account there but once a week she cashed a fifty-dollar check. Cashed the last one day before yesterday, afternoon of the night she was killed, and they hadn't sent it through for clearance yet so I copied the dope off it. It was signed— Just a minute." He shuffled through some papers and found a notation. "Signed by Gerald H. Piggott, Attorney, one-fourteen Reese Building, Seattle. And marked 'Alimony, account J. S. Waggoner.' The Seattle boys are on it. If J. S. Waggoner isn't in the phone book, they'll find him through the attorney."

"You think he's a suspect?"

McNulty shrugged. "If I had to pay a woman fifty a week for life, I'd be tempted to do something about it."

"You said you did get a call from K. C. Get anything at all?"

"Same as we got last night but with a little more detail that doesn't help. Lived two years at the rooming house address on the driver's license. They found two places she'd lived before that, about a year at each, one a hotel and the other another rooming house. Apparently her divorce was before then. They haven't found anybody who knew her husband."

"Run out on any bills when she left?"

"Not that they've found. And she turned in a forwarding address at the P. O. besides giving it to her landlady. General Delivery, Mayville."

"That may be the key, Mac," I said. "If we can find out why she came *here,* why she picked this as a destination before she started, then—"

The phone rang and I broke off. What I'd been going to say was obvious anyway.

McNulty picked up the phone and spoke into it, then put his hand over the mouthpiece and said, "It's Seattle calling. If you want to listen in on the extension it'll save me giving you a blow-by-blow afterwards."

I went to the extra desk in the corner and picked up the exten-

sion phone. I got it to my ear just in time to hear "Here's your call, Mr. McNulty," and then a man's voice, deep and resonant: "Mr. McNulty? This is John S. Waggoner calling. A lieutenant from the Seattle police just left here and he tells me my ex-wife was killed in your town. I answered all the questions he asked, as well as I could, and no doubt he'll be getting in touch with you. But I decided to call you direct meanwhile. I want to be of any help I can."

"Good," McNulty said. "Uh—Mr. Waggoner, when did you last see Amy?"

"A little over four years ago when she left here to go to Reno for the divorce."

"And when did you last hear from her?"

"Not since the divorce. We made it a clean break, didn't correspond. My attorney handles—handled—the alimony payments. Through him I knew she was living in Kansas City, but that's all. I don't know what she was doing there or anything about her for the past four years."

"You didn't know she came to Mayville a month ago?"

"No. If she sent a change of address to my attorney he didn't happen to mention it to me. In fact, I hope this doesn't hurt your civic pride but I never heard of Mayville till this morning. And all I know about it now is that it's in Arizona."

McNulty said, "It's a small town. Okay, then you can't help us with anything recent about Amy, but can you fill us in on anything about her past? And whether she's got relatives we should get in touch with?"

"No relatives, none that she knew about anyway. Amy was brought up in an orphanage; she didn't even know who her parents had been. This, I understand, was in Chicago. She told me she lived there—in Chicago, I mean, not in the orphanage—until she was—I forget exactly how old, but somewhere in her early twenties."

"You met her where?"

"Here in Seattle. I've lived in Seattle all my life. I met her—let's see—a little over seven years ago; we were married not quite three years before the divorce. She never told me much about her life between the time she left the orphanage and the time I met her. Not in detail, that is. She'd been a night club entertainer—singer and dancer. And in the chorus line of a revue. She'd been around a lot, traveled a lot. When I met her, though, she was a hat check girl at a night club here in Seattle."

"Had she been married before?"

"No. At least she told me she hadn't. And she was about twenty-eight or -nine then. I about five years older."

"What was her maiden name, Mr. Waggoner?"

"Evans. Amy Evans."

"Uh-huh. This is a personal question, Mr. Waggoner, but you got to ask personal questions in a murder case. Why were you and her divorced?"

"Well—it was Amy's drinking, mostly. And the marriage was a mistake in the first place; we found that out within the first year. The situation just got impossible. I'm not a teetotaler or a bluenose; I drink myself, in moderation. But Amy refused to *try* to stop or cut down."

"Why didn't you divorce her?"

"I suppose I could have, if I'd been willing to go through the scandal of a contested divorce here in Seattle. It wouldn't have helped my business, though, and I wouldn't have liked it personally. Besides—well, I still liked Amy well enough that I didn't want her to end up on skid row, or worse, as she might well have, without any source of income. So we were divorced by agreement—I agreed to fifty a week alimony, which I can afford, and paid her expenses to and in Reno to get the divorce. I made only one condition—it was a verbal one, but she kept it—I didn't want her ever to return to Seattle. I thought a clean break would be better for both of us; I didn't want to run into her or have any of my friends run into her."

"Uh-huh," McNulty said. "She lived in Kansas City four years, which means she must of gone right there from Reno. You don't know why she picked Kansas City to live in?"

"No, I don't—I haven't the faintest idea. And I'm afraid that's all I can tell you about Amy and that none of it is helpful. But while we're talking, there's one more thing. The lieutenant I talked to here said there was robbery connected with the murder. Did she have anything left? Money in the bank, or anything like that?"

"No bank account here, Mr. Waggoner. And the Kansas City police haven't found one there. If she had anything valuable in her room, jewelry or anything, it was taken too. There's just her clothes and her car. It's an old one, might be worth a couple of hundred but not much more."

"I see. That's what I'd have guessed; Amy wasn't the saving kind, never worried about tomorrow. But listen, Mr. McNulty, I want her to have a respectable funeral and burial—not just be taken from a morgue to a potter's field. I want her buried in a regular cemetery, and with a small headstone of some kind. And of course I want to pay for these things. Anything within reason—I'm not rich so don't go overboard on it. Can you make arrangements with your local mortician to take care of all the details, and to bill me?"

"Be glad to do that," McNulty said. "Uh—you want to name a top limit so he *won't* go over-

board? He'll probably like to have some idea of how high you want to go."

"Well, tell him to try to hold it to about a thousand over all. That's not a strict limit, but it's about what I had in mind."

"Fine, Mr. Waggoner. He'll do a good job and it won't run even that high. Not many funerals around here do. Uh—any religious preference, for the minister and all?"

"I'm afraid Amy wasn't religious. I guess you'd call her a Presbyterian, if anything. The orphanage she grew up in was Presbyterian so that was her early training. But I'd say any Protestant minister would do. And if your mortician has a chapel, I think she'd prefer it to a church service. This may sound irreverent, but I think Amy would be embarrassed to find herself in a church."

"Okay," McNulty said. "I'll go along with that, and he does have a chapel. You want to be notified of the time of the funeral?"

There was a momentary hesitation at the other end of the line. Then Waggoner said, "I won't be able to be there, so it won't be necessary. I'll want to have some flowers from me there but there's no point in my wiring them; let the mortician take care of that and add it to the bill."

"Sure. He'll take care of everything. Well, thanks a lot for calling."

When we'd both put down our phones he looked at his watch and grunted. "Eleven. Got any plans for the next half hour?"

I shook my head.

"I'm hungry. Got a few hours sleep but no breakfast and I'm ready for an early lunch. But with those long distance calls coming I hate to get away from that phone. How'd you like to hold down the office long enough for me to inhale a hamburger?"

"Sure, Mac," I said. "Glad to. And if either of the calls comes shall I take it and make notes so I can give it to you? Or want me to have 'em call back in half an hour?"

"Guess you can take either call. Just so you're sure you write down everything and don't forget anything."

He started for the door and then, halfway there, snapped his fingers and turned back. "Oh, one thing more and you oughta know about it if the coroner calls and you talk to him. The peanuts. Got several witnesses to this: Just before Amy left, while she was having her last drink, she bought a bag of peanuts from behind the bar and ate 'em."

I was puzzled. "What's important about that?"

"It'll give the coroner a pretty solid way to fix the time of death. We know what time she ate 'em, and he can tell from that how many hours after that she died."

"Does he know to look for that?"

"Sure. We got that while the sheriff was still here and he said he'd make a special point to tell the doc."

He got as far as the door and had it half open when he turned back again. "Oh, one more thing, in case you do get the call from Douglas. Tell 'em not to arrange for any disposition of the body. That there'll be a funeral here."

"Shall I ask them to send it back?"

"Nope, just to hold it." He grinned. "One thing you learn in public office, son, is don't make the voters pay for anything you can get done otherwise. We'll have Murcheson send his meat-wagon to Douglas for the body, and it can go on his bill. Well, so long."

This time he made it. The door closed behind him.

He'd been gone only seconds when the phone rang. I could have run to the door and called him back, but I was having fun being acting chief of police and I didn't want to call him back. I went around his desk and took his swivel chair and picked up the phone. I said, "Mayville Police Headquarters."

"Seattle calling collect. Is Chief McNulty there?"

"He isn't," I said. "But I'm authorized to take the call for him. Please put Seattle on."

A few seconds later a man's voice said, "This is Lieutenant Graves, Seattle Police. We've talked to and investigated the John Waggoner you asked us about. Ready?

"Ready. Waggoner called us since you talked to him and I imagine he gave us all the information about his ex-wife and their relations that he gave you. Maybe more; he talked quite a while. Anyway, just tell us what you learned *about* him."

"Right." His voice was clipped. "First, his alibi for Wednesday night is solid; he couldn't possibly have been in Arizona. He was in Portland, attending a convention; he was on the program and gave a speech."

"Fine," I said. "Go on."

"He's in real estate, has a downtown office and hires a dozen people—salesmen mostly. He's solvent, has an excellent credit rating, good reputation for honest dealing. His income must be at least twenty-five thousand a year, more likely fifty. And I mean after taxes. He's a member and past president of the Old Seattle Club, member of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, member of the board of—"

"Stop," I said. "You're breaking my heart. Did Chief McNulty ask you to check on anything else?"

"He asked us to get anything on Amy Waggoner that we could. It isn't much. No criminal

record except two arrests for drunkenness, one for drunken driving. And Mr. Waggoner's story of where he met her checks out—we called the club he said she'd been working at as a hat check girl and the proprietor remembers her. Said she'd worked there a few months and then quit to get married. That, if what she told him was straight, it was her first job in Seattle. She'd just come here. If she ever mentioned where she came from he doesn't remember it. That's the package. Unless there's some other angle you want us to check into."

"I don't think so," I said. "Sounds to me like that does it, and thanks a lot. If anything else does come up with a Seattle angle, Chief McNulty will call you again."

I pulled a pad of foolscap in front of me on McNulty's desk and, while it was fresh in my mind, I wrote down everything that had been told me.

A second later the phone rang again. I hoped it was Douglas calling, but it wasn't.

I said, "Mayville Police Department," and in the "Who is this speaking?" that I got back, I recognized Hetherton's dry voice.

"Spitzer," I told him.

"What are *you* doing there? I want to talk to McNulty."

I told him McNulty wasn't there and then what I was doing, including the fact that I was working on special assignment for Tom.

"All right, Spitzer. I suppose you've talked to McNulty. Have there been any breaks on the case?"

"Nothing important. Mostly he's waiting for the autopsy report."

"I see. Well, I had in mind phoning Acres if anything important happened, but as long as you're working on it for him—" He hesitated; he couldn't order me on his day off and he hated to be put in the position of asking me a favor. But he succumbed. "Ah—I wonder, Spitzer, if as long as you're going to be working on the case all day anyway, you'd mind keeping me posted on developments as well as Tom Acres?"

"Okay," I said. "I'll be phoning Tom sometime this afternoon anyway, to let him know what I've got up till then. I'll come in and make the call from the *Sun* office. You can listen and I won't have to tell it twice."

"Fine, Spitzer. Do that, please."

It was the first time I'd ever heard him say "please" to me, at least in an unsarcastic tone of voice, since the first time I'd talked to him.

And I'd hardly finished that phone call when another came; and when the operator said Douglas was calling I knew I'd hit the jackpot. From my point

of view McNulty had picked exactly the right time to get hungry.

It wasn't the coroner; it was the sheriff, but he had the coroner's report in front of him. When I explained why I was answering instead of McNulty, he was reluctant to talk at first and said he'd rather call back and talk to Mac himself.

But I guessed the reason for that. I said, "Listen, Sheriff, Mac *asked* me to take the call for him. And if you're worried about talking to me, I promised to keep it off the record. Now, how about Amy?"

"Cause of death just what it looked like—one knife thrust right to the heart—left ventricle, if that matters. Five inches deep, exactly, and it was a narrow blade sharp on one edge only. Death was instantaneous. Doc said she'd have been unconscious—in coma, he puts it—at the time. Percentage of alcohol in the blood point four nine. High enough to kill someone not as practiced a drinker as Amy. And she'd been drinking right up to the time she passed out."

I said, "Any signs of—" And then I did a mental double take, when what the sheriff had just said really registered.

"Wait, Sheriff! Is the doc *sure* of that? I mean that she'd been drinking right up to the moment of her death?"

"Up to almost the last minute. The last drink she'd taken, he said, had been probably ten minutes, not over fifteen at the outside, before she died. And—did Mac tell you about the peanuts?"

"Yes."

"Well, that sets time of death within half an hour at the outside. Doc says she finished eating them just about two hours before her death. That puts it at around two o'clock—anyway, after one thirty and before two thirty, if she finished eating them about midnight."

"Okay, Sheriff. But before you sign off, there's one thing Mac wanted me to tell you about." And I told him about John Waggoner's offer to pay for a funeral.

"Good deal," he said. "And your Murcheson can have the body any time he wants to send over for it. After today, that is. Couple of things we got to do yet."

"Such as?"

"Want to take a good set of fingerprints. Could be, when we send them to Washington, we'd find we got somebody with a record back when, any time under any name. And the other thing is some pictures, for identification. I mean, we asume this Amy Waggoner was the one who was married to John Waggoner and who lived in Kansas City. She probably was all right, but we got to make sure she wasn't a ringer."

I looked up as the door opened and said, "Here comes Mac, Sheriff. Want me to put him on?"

"Good God no. I don't want to say this all over again long distance. You tell him. So long."

I got out of Mac's chair behind the desk and let him take it.

"That was Douglas," I told him. "And the Seattle cops called earlier. But let me tell you about Douglas while it's fresh in my mind. I got the Seattle call all written down, but not this one."

"Shoot."

I pulled up a chair across from him and made myself comfortable. It had been a fairly long conversation with the sheriff, but I took my time repeating it and don't think I missed even a minor point. Once in a while he nodded or grunted, and once he belched, but that was all.

"Okay," he said when I'd finished. "And Seattle?"

"Right here," I said, and shoved the pad of foolscap across the desk to him. "Read it and if there's anything you want to ask—"

He read it and nodded. "Looks like we'll have to forget about suspecting Waggoner. Say, isn't Friday your day off? Hetherton got you working overtime or you just drop in for the hell of it?"

"Neither," I told him. "Tom Acres asked me to stay on the case for his paper and the wire service."

"Oh. What you doing next?"

"Eating, I guess. I didn't have any breakfast either, except some coffee."

"And after that?"

I shrugged. "Make the rounds, I guess. See who I can find to talk to or get statements from. And keep in touch with you once in a while."

"By the rounds you mean the taverns?"

"Mostly, yes. But the restaurants too. She didn't live completely on liquor. And—well, I guess you got everything from the bank that I could get. Maybe the post office— You checked up on what they remembered about her incoming mail, Mac, but did you ask about outgoing? They wouldn't have noticed ordinary letters, I guess, but if she sent any registered ones or mailed any packages—"

"She didn't, I checked that. But listen, since you're making those rounds anyway, there's something you can check up for me. Just means asking one extra question every place you go."

"Sure. What's the question?"

"How much she spent there. We know now how much that alimony was, fifty bucks a week. I want to know whether she lived on that or spent more. If she spent more then she had money coming from somewhere else, see?"

"Good idea, Mac. Come to think of it, I'll bet she *did* spend more than that."

"Well, Birdie'll be able to give you the answer on clothes. You won't have to canvass the dress shops. Birdie snoops. She'll of been curious enough to at least have looked through Amy's dresses in the closet after she came and she'd of taken a glance once in a while since. She'll know what's new and what ain't. And I had to bawl the hell out of her for snooping once, so she's more likely to tell you about Amy's clothes than I can."

"Will I be able to get into Amy's room?"

"Birdie's got a key, yeah. But why?"

"I was just thinking if Birdie plays coy and won't admit she knows anything about Amy's clothes, I could check labels on them before I try clothing stores here. Even if they didn't remember the sales they'd know whether or not they handled that brand —and how expensive it is."

"Good deal. I can use some help—and it kills two birds with one stone for you, since you want to stay on the case anyway. I'll be checking hotel and motel registrations for the last week. Birdie's too; I'll be out there sometime today. But like I said she's more likely to talk to you than me about Amy's clothes."

"You're going to close down the office for a while then?"

He shook his head. "I'm going to phone Charlie and have him come in early; I won't leave till he gets here."

I decided one drink before eating lunch wouldn't hurt me and I had to talk to Cass anyway so I started diagonally across the street toward his place, and then remembered it was too early. Cass never hires a bartender and so he doesn't open his place before one o'clock. There isn't much morning drinking in Mayville anyway so he doesn't lose much business that way. It gives him long hours, twelve a day, but he claims he doesn't mind; he's just as happy behind the bar as anywhere else. And, especially off-season, he doesn't always open on time or keep the place open till one-o'clock closing hour. If business is dull, or if he happens to feel like it, he just pulls down the door shade with "Closed" on the outside of it and takes off.

So even today I couldn't be sure Cass's place would be open at one, but I could be sure it wouldn't open before then. He never came down earlier than that.

So I headed back the other way, for the *Thunderbird*—the best place in town to eat, which is why—on my salary—I almost never ate there alone, even for lunch. I knew Amy had eaten there, at least occasionally.

I went past the bar into the dining room. I still wanted one drink before I ate, but the *Thunderbird* doesn't put on a bartender until late afternoon. However, if you want a drink sooner than that George Mitkos, the proprietor, will go behind the bar and make you one. So when the waitress brought me a menu I asked her if she'd ask Mr. Mitkos to make me a highball. He'd bring it to the table himself, and that would give me my chance to talk to him.

I knew Mitkos only slightly, and not too much about him. He was between forty and fifty, short heavy-set, always smiling and almost too polite—for Arizona, anyway.

He brought my drink and put it down in front of me.

"Listen, George," I said, "sit down a minute. I'd like to ask you a few questions if I may. Bring yourself a drink if you'll have one with me."

He sat down across from me. "Certainly, Bob. What do you want to know?"

"You knew Amy Waggoner, didn't you? I know she ate here at least part of the time."

"Yes, I knew her—only as a customer, though. She ate here—well, I wouldn't say regularly, but almost regularly. Once in a while she'd miss a day. But one meal a day only, just dinner."

"I see, George. But there's one way you *can* help. I'm working with McNulty on this—at least at the moment—and he asked me to talk to all the people she did business with. What we're trying to establish is what her habit patterns were and how much money she spent at various places. We know what her income was and it looks as though she had been living outside it—but we want to make sure, and by how much. How much per week, on the average, would you say she spent here?"

He thought a moment. "She always ordered a regular dinner. You know our evening menu, Bob. No dinner runs under two dollars; nothing except lobster when we have it, and some special steaks run over three. I didn't always notice what she ordered, but I don't recall offhand her having ordered either lobster or a special steak. So her dinner cost between two and three dollars."

"And drinks? Did she have one or more cocktails before?"

"Usually two."

"Then to break that down—or add it up—and adding in the tips, what would you guess she spent in here per week?"

"I'd say that, counting the tip—which was always fifty cents, incidentally—she spent about four dollars every time she ate here. And she came at least five evenings a week. Twenty dollars a week would be a fair estimate."

It began to look as though

McNulty's hunch was dead right.

I finished eating and walked back toward the middle of town. Cass was open now but I went on past him. I wanted to check the other restaurants first and get Amy's eating habits established. There are only three restaurants in town besides the *Thunderbird* and they're all within two blocks in the middle of town.

I drew a blank at the first one; they didn't know Amy, either by name or from my description.

I did a little better at the second one. They knew her slightly there. She'd dropped in once or twice a week for an evening meal. That explained the night or two a week she didn't show up at the *Thunderbird*. Prices were relatively low—most meals ran a dollar to a dollar and a quarter—but the food was good. Amy could have eaten here occasionally just for variety, not necessarily to save money.

I began to wonder if Amy got by on one meal a day, but I learned otherwise at the third restaurant. Amy ate breakfast there, either every day or almost every day, at about the same time other people were eating lunch. She ate a light breakfast, usually hotcakes and coffee. She always left a dime tip. So her breakfasts cost her an average of fifty cents a day, or three and a half dollars a week. To make things come out nice and even I assumed she'd spent a dollar and a half at the restaurant where she ate an occasional evening meal—and that brought Amy's total restaurant bill to twenty-five dollars a week—which left her an impossible five for all other expenses.

Cass took care of that five dollars. That was the exact amount of his estimate of how much Amy spent at his place per week. He said she came in an average of three afternoons, stayed two or three hours when she came, and usually drank three or four highballs at fifty cents apiece. Sometimes somebody bought her a drink but she always insisted on buying back so that evened out.

When I left Cass's the *Lode* was my next stop, but I figured this would be only one of two trips I'd have to make there—one now to talk to Dick Johnson, the day bartender, and again after five o'clock to talk to Willie.

I was lucky, though; they were both there.

I got estimates from both of them and added them together. Amy had spent at least twenty dollars a week at the *Lode* and it was more likely twenty-five and could have been as much as thirty. She came in for a while almost every afternoon—sometimes quite late in the afternoon; these were probably the days she'd spent some time at Cass's first. And she was there almost every evening, from seven or

eight o'clock on. Most evenings she stayed through till the one-o'clock closing hour, although sometimes she got tired or sleepy —or decided she'd had enough —and went home a bit earlier.

"Willie, you said she was here *almost* every evening. Got any idea what she did the other evenings? However few they were? She never spent an evening at Cass's, nor a full evening at the *Thunderbird*."

Willie shrugged. "Maybe she stayed home once in a while, and drank in her room?"

I shook my head. "Birdie says she was gone every evening, usually until after Birdie herself was asleep. She'd have seen Amy's light on if Amy had stayed home. Besides, she didn't drink in her room—didn't drink alone at all unless you count cocktails before dinner, and then there were other people around."

I ran along. I considered going on to Birdie's, but I'd come afoot as far as the *Lode* and decided to go to the motel later after I'd been back into town to pick up my car.

I had to pass the police station anyway so I dropped in to see if anything had happened there. McNulty pushed his papers aside as I came in and waved me to the chair across from him."

"How'd you come out, Bob?"

He jotted down figures while I talked and when I finished added them up. He said, "That's seventy a week, even taking the lowest guess you got from the *Lode*, and I'll bet she spent more than twenty a week there. So her routine spending, the things we know of, comes to at least seventy."

I said, "You'd better add five for incidentals—laundry, gasoline, toothpaste, stuff like that."

"Right. Makes seventy-five. And she *did* buy some clothes, if not a lot of 'em." He paused. "When I got the registration cards from Birdie, I put her on the carpet about clothes and she did level with me that far. She still wouldn't admit that she'd ever looked in Amy's suitcases or drawers so she wouldn't stick her neck out on small purchases. But she admitted that in cleaning the closet she couldn't help seeing what was hanging up. And she says those Western pants, Western shirt, cowboy boots and the fiesta dress weren't there the first week or so. Birdie says that down below the border she might have got it as cheap as twenty bucks. The other new stuff was American made, and Birdie says they probably cost at least thirty bucks altogether. So even if she didn't buy any smaller stuff like lingerie or stockings that's fifty bucks' worth of clothes in four weeks. Twelve-fifty a week average. Let's see, where does that put us?"

I said, "Eighty-seven fifty if we take the lowest figure from

the *Lode*. I'll go along with you that that figure's too low—she must have been spending at least ninety a week and I'd say a hundred is more likely. Just about twice her alimony. Anything else happen here?"

The phone rang and he picked it up.

It was three o'clock. I decided I might as well call Tom Acres and give him the score to date. I didn't have any one big item, but I had enough minor new ones to give him a follow-up story already, so he could get it in type and on the wire.

So I crossed diagonally to the *Sun* office and walked in. Hetherton was alone in the office, at his desk. I looked around to see where our horse-faced bookkeeper and ad-taker, Alicia Howell, was, but I didn't see her. Either she was out on an errand or missing for the day. The printers, I knew, would be gone too; after working most of the night getting the paper off the press on Thursday night, they were off on Fridays, as I was.

Hetherton looked up as I came in. "Well, Spitzer? Any developments?"

"Nothing important. Enough minor details to give him a follow-up. Report on the inquest, some things about Amy's past from her ex-husband, although they don't seem to tie in with the murder. Let me phone Tom and you can listen in."

I sat down at my desk and reached for the phone and then changed my mind. I said, "Think I'll do a better job of organizing it if I type it out first and then read the story to Tom."

"How long do you think it will take you, Spitzer? I mean writing it out plus making the call."

"Not over half an hour unless I have trouble getting the call through. Why?"

"I have two errands to do out. I can probably do them in that length of time; it won't be over an hour at the very most. Would you mind staying here till I come back, even if you finish sooner?"

"Sure," I said, but wondered why he wanted me to.

Hetherton said, "Ah—here's why. My wife phoned earlier. She's coming downtown to do some minor shopping and wants some money for it. I've had to stay here and I'm late for an appointment now. But if you'll stay—"

"Sure," I said again. "If you're sure it won't be over an hour. I've got other things to do." I didn't know what they were but I didn't want to get stuck too long.

"Fine." He stood up and came around the desk to get his Panama hat off the hatrack. "Ah—the safe is not locked. Give her what she wants out of the petty cash. There's only fifty dollars in it but she said minor shopping so I imagine that's more than she has

in mind. Put in a slip showing how much you give her, so the cash box will balance."

"Okay," I said. "Just one thing. If I've made my call and if she's come and gone before you get back, is it all right if I lock the door and leave?"

"Certainly. Be sure you lock the safe too. And—ah—you might leave the transcript of your story on my desk so I can bring myself up to date on the minor points."

He left and I turned back to my typewriter, getting my mind onto what I was going to write. Or trying to.

A small sound that must have been a sniff made me look up.

Mrs. Hetherton was standing in front of my desk, glaring down at me. The *Sun's* office door isn't a noisy one and I hadn't heard her come in.

I stood up politely.

Have I described Mrs. Hetherton for you? No, I guess she hasn't come in as yet. But you've missed nothing. She's small and, if I may be forgiven clichés which fit so perfectly that I can't avoid them, she's as thin as a rail and has a face like a vinegar cruet. And has a voice like a rusty gate hinge.

"Young man," she demanded. "Where is Mr. Hetherton?"

"He had to go out on business. He said you were coming in for some money and asked me to give it to you out of the petty cash. How much do you want?"

"He might have waited himself. Hmpf. All right, twenty dollars is all I need."

I got the cash box out of the safe and gave her twenty dollars. She didn't thank me, or say goodbye or God bless me. She left without a word while I was putting the box back into the safe.

I was just about to spin the dial when I remembered I hadn't put a notation in the cash box. I went back to my desk and scribbled one: "Gave Mrs. Hetherton $20. R. S." and went back to the safe and put it in the cash box. And then, with the door of the safe still open and with the knowledge that Hetherton had been gone only ten minutes and certainly wouldn't be back in the next five, I was suddenly tempted to snoop. I wanted to know how much Hetherton made; I'd been wondering for a year now.

There wasn't much in the safe besides the cash box and the books, the journal and two ledgers, one for the newspaper end and one for the job printing end, that Alicia Howell kept up. They wouldn't be of any interest to me. But there was a smaller book on a separate shelf; I knew what it was but I'd never seen inside it. Hetherton let Miss Howell do the routine bookkeeping but he himself made out the monthly profit and loss statements and this looseleaf book held them. It wouldn't do me any *good* to look inside it and see how much Hetherton

made, but I was curious, and if I knew I'd know whether to hate him more or less for the small salary he paid me.

I pulled out the book and opened it to the front. Last month, month of April, showed a profit of something over thirteen hundred dollars. Gross or net? I ran down the items of the statement —advertising revenue, revenue from subscriptions, from job printing. Then the expenses—and they included depreciation on building and equipment, salaries, allowance for taxes (estimated)—yes, they included everything; that thirteen hundred was net profit, not gross. The figure for salaries was about four times mine, which didn't surprise me. Miss Howell probably got a little less than I did and the printers a little more; you can't hire a competent printer, even an old broken-down non-union one, for quite as little as what some damn fool who wants to be a reporter will work for.

A year back, the length of time I'd worked there, was as far as I cared to look; I closed the book and reached to put it back on its shelf in the safe. And, as I did so, I saw that there was a plain white envelope lying on the shelf; it had been under the book I'd picked up.

I looked at the door again and took a chance. The envelope was lying back up so I'd already seen that it wasn't sealed. I took it out and opened it. Inside was one sheet of paper, folded three times. I opened it out—and stared at it in complete bewilderment because, to me, it meant absolutely nothing.

It was a Wanted poster that apparently had been put up once on a bulletin board in a post office or somewhere because there were thumbtack holes in the four corners.

It had a picture of a young man who was a complete stranger to me. A pair of pictures, rather, one full-face and one profile. They'd been taken in jail for the full-face one had a set of numbers hanging from his neck.

There was a set of fingerprints at the bottom and the heading "Wanted for Armed Robbery" at the top.

The name and description were between the pictures and the fingerprints: James Norcutt, 5′ 11″, 150 lbs., black hair, blue eyes—I don't remember the rest of the description because I didn't try to memorize it.

Under the description was another paragraph asking anyone who could give information about James Norcutt to notify the Chief of Police at Hoboken, New Jersey. And there was a date—almost twenty-five years ago. And the paper, I had already noticed, was beginning to yellow—despite being calendared and coated stock—enough to fit in with that date.

I put the paper back in the envelope, the envelope back where

I'd found it and the profit and loss book back on top of it. I closed the safe and locked it.

I turned back to my typewriter and put my mind on the story. So I started off with the results of the autopsy and gave McNulty a plug by telling of his discovery —and it had been his originally, even if I'd done the leg work— that Amy had been spending at least since she'd come to Mayville, approximately twice her known income.

Then, for a last minute check before phoning Tom, I phoned McNulty just to be sure nothing new had come up since I'd seen him.

Nothing had except that he'd called Kansas City and they'd work on the angle of finding out how much Amy had spent a week while she'd been living there. "Say, Bob, you still planning on running out to Birdie's after you phone in your story?"

"Hadn't planned that far ahead, Mac. But I can. Why?"

"Something you can do for me if you go there. Little complicated to explain over the phone. Drop across the street before you go out there and I'll tell you."

"Right. Be seeing you."

I put down the phone and then picked it up again. I asked for Tom Acres and a minute later was talking to him. I read him what I'd just written.

He said, "Okay, Bob. You can't make bricks without straw and it'll do for a follow-up. But stay with it and phone me anytime up to ten o'clock if anything worth printing breaks loose."

"Okay, Tom."

"Okay, boy. And good luck."

When I put down the phone I walked over to Hetherton's desk and put the story down on it. Then I went out and across the street to the police station.

McNulty nodded when I came in. "On your way out to Birdie's?"

"Right."

"Talked to Murcheson and gave him the order for the funeral. And he reminded me of something by asking what we wanted her to be buried in, so somebody ought to pick up an outfit for that. And if you're going to Birdie's anyway, you might as well. She was mother naked, wrapped in a sheet, when they took her to Douglas, and I guess they don't bury people that way even if it's a closed casket."

"Will it *be* closed casket, Mac?"

"Not unless the autopsy did any cutting above the neck, and I don't see why it should of. Anyway, pick out a good dress and all the trimmings. If you don't know what to pick or what all a woman wears to get buried in get Birdie to help you. Bring it in one of the suitcases; there's one small one just about right for holding one outfit."

"Will do," I said. "Bring the

suitcase to you or to Murcheson?"

"Don't matter. Me, I guess; he'll be a few blocks out of your way and I'll be seeing him tomorrow anyway about details. Listen, I'll be here till six—that's as long as I'm going to stick around unless something happens. After that and before I go home I'm going to have a drink at Cass's. If you show up there I'll buy you one and you can give me the clothes."

"Fine," I said. "See you there—unless I see you here sooner."

Herbie didn't look up from the row he was mowing as Birdie and I walked past him. She let us in and left the pass key in the outside of the lock. We went right to the closet and I took out the small suitcase McNulty had mentioned. I put it on the bed and opened it; it was empty. I asked Birdie to look in the dresser drawers and pick out a set of undergarments and a pair of stockings, and while she did so, I looked over the several pairs of shoes on the floor of the closet and picked out what I thought would be the most suitable ones, a pair of plain black pumps. They were in good shape except that the heels were run down a little in back—but that wouldn't show in a coffin and Amy wasn't going to have to do any walking in them.

Then we consulted on the major item, the dress. The fiesta dress was by far the newest, most expensive and best looking garment in the closet and I'd have been tempted to choose it. But Birdie thought it would be inappropriate so I let her talk me out of it—although I still think it's what Amy herself would have chosen. Birdie wanted to pick out a white organdie that was probably the simplest dress in the closet—but I remembered something that would also have ruled out the fiesta dress; it and the organdie both had rather low necklines. I explained to Birdie that since we didn't know how extensive the autopsy had been, the higher the neckline the better; it might make the difference of whether or not the funeral would have to be a closed casket deal. She saw the point and we ended up picking out a dark blue dress that had a quite high neckline and was in as good shape as any of the others otherwise. Birdie folded it into the suitcase and that was that; Amy was outfitted for her final trip.

I put the suitcase with clothes for Amy in my car and drove to town. It was just six o'clock when I started, perfect timing to catch McNulty at Cass's and have the drink he'd offered me.

He was there at the near end of the bar and talking to Cass when I walked in. He turned and, since I had his eye, I put down the suitcase just to one side of the door and nodded toward it so he'd

know what it was. Then I joined them.

"Same as usual, Bob?" Cass asked me, and when I nodded he started making me a highball.

"Anything happen your end?" I asked McNulty who shook his head.

Cass was coming back with my drink; he put it down and rang up the money from the change in front of McNulty. Someone at the other end of the bar clinked a glass for a refill and he went there instead of coming back to us.

"Nothing from Kansas City?"

"Nope. It'll take 'em a while to make a good guess on how much Amy spent there." He finished his drink. "Well, I got to go."

I tried to talk him into letting me buy back, but couldn't. He said he'd told his wife he'd be home by a quarter after six and it was almost that now; besides he didn't want another drink, all he wanted was dinner and a chance to fall in bed. He took the suitcase of Amy's clothes with him when he left.

Cass looked down the bar to see if I wanted another drink myself, but I had half of mine left and shook my head at him to indicate that I'd nurse it a while.

One of the two men down the bar—I knew him by sight as the head teller at the bank but didn't know his name—went over to the juke box and put in a coin, pushed a button. The music started as he came back, an instrumental version of *None But the Lonely Heart.* And after the few bars of introduction Cass started singing with it. Softly, just loud enough to carry over the music. That sad and beautiful song.

But I wasn't in a mood for sadness or for beauty. I was annoyed with myself because it looked as though I wasn't going to have anything more worth phoning to Tom Acres, even with almost four hours to go before his deadline.

Damn it, I thought, nothing can happen in those four hours. Charlie Sanger would keep headquarters open but he wouldn't be working on the case. And there was nothing I could think of to do myself, not a damn thing to do or a damn question to ask anybody that anybody hadn't been asked already, either by me or by McNulty.

Nothing.

Well, I'd have to eat dinner sometime between now and his deadline anyway so I decided I might as well do it now as later. I waited till Cass had finished singing with the record—I wouldn't have thought of walking out in the middle of it—and then said so long and left.

I ate an indifferent meal at one of the inexpensive restaurants and took my time over it. By the time I got out it was about seven o'clock and just beginning to get dark.

I crossed the street diagonally to Cass's.

Cass was alone. "Glad to see you, Bob," he said, and said it as though he meant it. "Listen, before I make you a drink let me make you a proposition."

"Go ahead. Unless it's an indecent proposition."

He laughed. "Looks like a dull evening and I was thinking about closing and taking a run down to Bisbee and Naco if I could find someone to go with me. We haven't been down there together for six months or so. How does it hit you?"

I said, "It hits me fine, but I can't. I'm sort of on duty till ten. Not working very hard, but I have to stay in touch with the gendarmes till Tom Acres' deadline in case something happens."

"Well, ten isn't too late to start. What if I keep open till then, and then we take off?"

"Afraid I can't tonight, Cass. But if you want to go alone, or find someone else to go with you, I'll clear out of here whenever you want to start. I can call time over at the *Lode.*"

Cass shook his head. "I'll skip it. It was just a sudden impulse. Highball?"

I nodded. "But I'm going to nurse it. I don't want to drink fast and get crocked by ten. So you're not going to make much money staying open just for me."

He grinned. "Wouldn't make much taking you to Mexico either. Don't worry; there'll be other customers later. It's not half-past seven yet."

He made me the highball. And said, "And that reminds me. The backbar's getting low on a few things. Excuse me while I bring some bottles from the back room."

I sat with the drink in front of me and stared at myself in the backbar mirror. Trying to think of something to think about.

Well, there was that puzzling Wanted handbill for—what was his name, James Norcutt—that I'd found in Hetherton's safe. It couldn't possibly tie in with Amy Waggoner's murder any way I could figure out. Still—it wouldn't hurt to ask McNulty if he'd ever heard of anyone named James Norcutt. Not tonight, of course, desperate as I was for something else to give Tom. I could hardly wake him just to ask him that question when the odds were a million to one I'd get a negative answer.

Cass came back with an armload of bottles and started putting them on the backbar. It suddenly occurred to me that if this Norcutt had any connection with Mayville maybe somebody in town besides McNulty would have heard of him. And what was to lose asking?

"Cass," I said, "have you ever heard of anyone named James Norcutt?"

He turned as I started to ask the question and by the time I was out with the name he was facing straight toward me. I saw the startled look that came across his face and then saw it freeze—and in that fraction of a second I knew who James Norcutt, wanted for armed robbery in Hoboken, was. The changes—after all those years—were greater than the resemblances, but the resemblances were still there. His face was broader, and so was Cass; the young Norcutt had weighed a hundred fifty and Cass was a little over two hundred. And his hair was stubby, almost a crew cut, and iron gray; Norcutt's had been long and black, combed sleekly. But the color of his eyes hadn't changed and his height, five-eleven, was still the same. And the fingerprints would still fit.

But there was plenty of change—and I might never have guessed the truth if he'd had his back toward me and I hadn't seen that sudden change of expression when I'd spoken the name. Had that happened and had he made his face normal before he turned and said, "No, who's he?" I probably still wouldn't have made the connection.

But as it had happened, I knew—and he knew that I knew.

He sighed and opened a drawer behind the bar, came out with a revolver. He said, and his voice was calm, "Sorry, Bob. Don't move off that stool."

The gun I knew because once, when we'd been talking about guns, he'd showed it to me. A lightweight little snub-nosed Colt Cobra, a thirty-eight. And I knew he kept it loaded.

He walked around the end of the bar to the front and pulled down the door shade that said "Closed" on the outside, holding the gun under his bartender's apron so no one happening to glance in could see it. He clicked the lock of the door. He pulled down the shades of the windows on each side of the door. And then went back behind the bar and flicked some switches; all the lights went off except the one bulb above the backbar that he kept on as a night light.

Then he came around the bar again to my side of it. I hadn't said anything yet—I hadn't thought of anything to say.

He said, "We've got to talk. Take a booth. Take your drink if you want."

I stood up but I didn't take my drink. I didn't want it even if it might be the last drink I'd ever have. I found my voice. I said, "Cass, it won't do you any good to kill me."

"That's what we've got to talk out. Sit down."

I slid into a booth and Cass sat down across from me. He kept the gun in his hand in his lap, maybe thinking I'd make a grab for it; nothing was farther from my mind. I knew I couldn't win out

in a tussle with Cass, even if he wasn't armed.

He asked, "Does anybody else know about this?"

"Yes," I said. "At least one person—and probably two. So you see it won't do you any good to—"

"Who?"

I shook my head firmly. "Cass, I won't tell you that, even if you threaten to kill me for not telling. If I told you you *could* kill me and have a chance, however slim a one, of getting away with it. At least you'd know who else you'd have to kill besides me and you could try. You killed Amy because she was blackmailing you, didn't you?"

He grunted and stared at me a few seconds, thinking. He said, "You were in Amy's room this afternoon—I heard you talking to Mac about it. You could have found that Wanted poster then—even though I couldn't find it, and I damn near took the place apart looking. And if that's the case—say, stand up."

A little puzzled, I stood. He said, "Empty your pockets, all of them, onto the table, and turn each one wrong side out as you empty it. If you did find it there and still have it on you, then you're probably lying about anyone else knowing about it."

"Okay," I said, and started following orders. "But I didn't find it, or even see it, at the motel." I finished emptying my pockets and said, "That's the entire lot, Cass."

He didn't take any chances. He put the gun down where he could reach it and I couldn't, and made sure. He looked through my wallet to check that I hadn't folded the poster and put it inside. I always carry some folded copy paper for taking notes. He unfolded it and made sure I didn't have the poster between the sheets.

He sighed. "Okay. Put it back and sit down again."

I said, "Cass, talking may help you think. Get it off your chest. What have you got to lose? We've got all night."

That last sentence scared me when I said it, because it was true. We *did* have all night; nobody would miss me before morning. Tom Acres wouldn't worry if he didn't hear from me again. Charlie Sanger might possibly try to get in touch with me, but if he did and found Cass's was closed, he'd think nothing of it. And my landlady would think nothing of my not being home yet when she herself retired; that happened often.

Cass sighed again. "All right. I suppose it doesn't matter now and I might as well tell you. Let's see—where'll I start. I grew up—this was in Detroit—with a bad gang. Just out of high school I got caught with some others, in a burglary. I was nineteen then. Took a two-year rap and served eighteen months of it. That was

when I got mugged and printed—which makes the picture of me on that Wanted circular almost thirty years old.

"When I got out of jail I got out of Detroit, went to New York. Made an honest living, such as it was, for about four years and then was out of work for a while—and this was in the Depression. I got in with a couple of bad boys again and fell when they talked me into helping them with a job they said was a pushover. In Hoboken. All they wanted me for was lookout and driver; I wouldn't even have to go in the place."

I said, "You'd have been about twenty-five then, about twenty-five years ago."

"Yeah, and I didn't think it was anything worse than burglary or I wouldn't have gone in with them. I wasn't carrying a gun, and they told me they weren't carrying any either. But I'd never be able to prove that. Well, anyway, I was waiting outside in the car with the engine running when the shooting started inside. I was scared spitless but I didn't want to rat on them whatever was happening. I stuck there till I heard a siren coming before I drove off.

"Learned later from the papers what had happened. They'd both been heeled. And they'd cased the job wrong or timed it wrong because they ran into a watchman and had to shoot it out with him. One of them was killed. The other one and the watchman were both wounded—and the watchman died four months later. The one they got alive came clean—and that put *me* on the spot. I had to lam. They had my record, my prints and my mug shots—which were only a few years old then."

I asked, "But where does Amy come into this, Cass? How'd *she* learn about it?"

Cass said. "Amy doesn't come in for a long time yet. But you wanted the whole story, didn't you? And I'll get mixed up if I start to skip around.

"I made it to Florida, got a job on a truck farm—and stayed there seven years, till I was thirty-two."

He took out cigarettes and offered me one; we lighted up. He said, "Know where I learned to sing? On that farm. Funny thing. Luigi Vitelli ran it. He'd been in opera all his life until a few years before when he'd retired and bought the farm, a small one. He'd been nine years with the Met, supporting roles, never a top star; his voice wasn't quite good enough for that. But he knew every note of damn near every opera, and had scores for most of them. His wife Elsa—she was a German—had never sung professionally, but she had a fair contralto and could sight read anything on piano. Just the three of us lived there and every evening was a jam session—if you can call music like that a jam session.

"Vitelli had found out almost

right away that I had a good natural voice—and a good ear; neither one's much good without the other—and started teaching me. I liked it. And the Vitellis liked me and I liked them; by the time I'd been there a year I was almost a son to them. They taught me languages too—the ones most operas are sung in. Found I had a natural aptitude there, too.

"And he improved my English, too, during those seven years. Not that it was too bad; I'd had a high school education and had never picked up a dese-dem-dose type of accent, but *his* English was perfect and he pounced on any minor slip I made as enthusiastically as on any wrong note I sang.

"Those seven years were about the best seven of my life, I guess. But nothing lasts forever. Vitelli died. Elsa sold the farm—I stayed with her till she did. She went back to New York; wanted me to come with her but that would have been too risky for me, too much chance of running into someone who would still recognize me as James Norcutt."

"What name did you use at the farm?"

"Cass Phillips. That was the name I gave when I took the job with Vitelli, and I've never changed it since. Well—"

He broke off. "My God, I didn't mean to go into this much detail."

"Go right ahead," I said.

"All right. You know, Bob, you were right about one thing—it's doing me good to be able to talk about things I haven't been able to talk about for so many years.

"So I took stock of myself," he continued, "wondering whether I should try to find another hide-out job—and decided I could take the risk, anywhere a long way from New York and Detroit. At thirty-two I already looked plenty different from that picture at nineteen. I'd filled out; I was a lot heavier and healthier. And I'd had a break—my hair had turned prematurely gray and I was already wearing it short like now. I didn't think anyone would recognize me unless it was someone who knew me fairly well.

"What I wanted to do was sing. Not opera or the stage—I wasn't good enough for either of those and besides they'd be too risky for me. I couldn't risk getting famous, even if I could have. But night club work or singing with a small band, and doing it only on or near the West Coast, seemed safe enough for me to chance it.

"Got my first job there as a singing waiter in a joint that tried to imitate the Bowery in everything but prices. All old-time songs. I made a go of it, better than a go. I had a voice that made me stand out over the other singing waiters like Caruso singing with a high school glee club. I

had a bigger, better voice then than I do now. I started getting offers, and taking them. Mostly night club work. Always picked, even if it cost me money, places with orchestras that weren't too jazzy. I was at my best with solid stuff—like *Night and Day,* for instance. I could fill a club with a song like that and the customers would stop yakking and *listen.* I worked around San Francisco for five years and did all right. Had to watch myself, lay off once in a while, to keep from getting *too* well known. Turned down one offer from a movie scout, But finally I did take an out-of-town offer. Owner of a club in Las Vegas caught me one night and offered me a three-month contract there and I took it. And it was in Las Vegas that I met Amy.

"She was singing there too. In Las Vegas, I mean, not in the same club. She didn't have much of a voice—short on volume and short on range—but she was pretty as hell in those days and she could put over a song. She was in her early twenties then and I was —let's see—about thirty-seven, but that didn't seem to matter. We liked each other and started going around, and then it was more than liking and we teamed up."

"You mean you sang together?"

"I mean we lived together. I was head-over-heels at first and wanted to marry her, but Amy refused to 'tie herself down.' Maybe figured on account of the difference in our ages I'd be a has-been about the time she was hitting the top."

"How long did you live together?"

"Almost three years. But don't make me get ahead of the story. Something happened sooner than that. After we'd run out our contracts in Las Vegas Amy wanted to go to Los Angeles, thought we'd do better there. And I went along—but suggested we take a week's vacation on the way, wander a little, see Yosemite and a few places."

"We did it that way and sometime about the middle of the week we stopped late afternoon on the edge of a little California town, I forget the name, and checked in at a motel. While I was taking a bath Amy called in she was going to walk into town; she had a letter to mail and wanted a few things from the drugstore. When she came back she acted kind of strange, worried, and I finally got it out of her. She'd gone into the post office to get a stamp for her letter and had happened to look at the posters on the bulletin board. She'd seen the one of me and—well, it looked a little more like I did then than like I do now.

"The resemblance was enough to worry her, anyway. And she'd made sure nobody was watching and then had taken down the poster. She showed it to me. If

I'd have been smart I'd have laughed it off as an accidental and slight resemblance—but I guess I was too startled to act well enough to get away with it. Just like I was too startled when you asked me if I knew James Norcutt a little while ago. Guess when something hits me suddenly, I can't act worth a damn."

"She kept the poster all those years?"

"No, we burned it. After she swore never to tell anybody, and I believed her. Then a little less than three years later, we broke up. Or Amy broke us up. Oh, neither of us was as much in love by then as we had been.

"I guess I wasn't too sorry. She was drinking a lot more heavily by then and we wouldn't have got along indefinitely anyway. We made the break clean and agreed not even to write. I didn't see her or hear from her for over ten years—until a month ago. When she walked in the bar here and—but I'll keep things in order.

"I went back to San Francisco and the clubs there again. Did all right, but not as well as before. Maybe I was getting old for that kind of work—forty can be old for night club singing. Or maybe my style of singing was getting old hat.

"So I went back to Las Vegas and got a job as a dealer—croupier to you; there they call you a dealer even if you run a crap table or spin a wheel—and built my stake back a little. Meanwhile my voice came back, as good as it is now, but still not strong enough for me to have wanted to start out cold again at forty-five or so as a pro singer.

"And that was the score one day four years ago when I happened to meet a guy from Mayville, in Vegas on vacation, who said he had a small tavern here he wanted to sell. I just barely had enough money to swing it—I'm still making payments on the license—"

I said, "And then Amy walked in. How'd she know where you were?"

"Never bothered to ask her, but I figured it out. A couple of months ago a guy came through here and happened to drop in, someone who'd known Amy and me when we were living together in L. A. He asked me about her, and I told him truthfully that I didn't have the slightest idea where she was or what she was doing. But he was heading east, driving, and for whatever reason he must have stopped over in Kansas City for a while. And ran into Amy accidentally there and told her about having seen me. I can't figure out any other way she could have found out."

"And Amy put the bite on you for fifty a week?"

"Exactly. Friendly about it, but wouldn't take a cent less or

even argue about it. Fifty a week or she'd turn me in. She had another copy of that poster and showed it to me.

"Bob, I didn't want to kill Amy. But she wouldn't listen to reason and I couldn't see any other way out. Except maybe by just walking out on everything I've got here and going on the lam again, taking a job washing dishes or tending bar or something. And even then they'd have caught up with me.

"Hell, it was Amy or me, and I decided it had to be Amy. Killing is just what a blackmailer deserves. Hell, Bob, I *couldn't* have gone on paying Amy fifty bucks a week; I'd have been broke by fall. If she'd only been reasonable . . ."

He thought he was justified in having killed Amy. But, I wondered, how was he going to justify to himself killing me, if he decided to. Probably simple self-defense—his life or mine.

But I didn't want him to start thinking about that. I wanted to keep him talking.

"Just what happened Wednesday night?" He was silent.

"You killed Amy in cold blood."

"I suppose I did. But mercifully—you've got to give me that. She'd passed out, never felt the knife or had a second of pain, never knew she died. How many people have that easy a death?"

He came back, sat across from me again.

I said, "How come she let you in her room, Cass? Wasn't she afraid of you? Or had you been there before?"

"No, I'd never been there before. Never been to Birdie's motel, for that matter. But I knew Amy's room number. She'd told me, and suggested I drop in some night after I'd closed up here." He chuckled without humor. "I doubt if her intentions were honorable. She must still have had a soft spot for me—even if it wasn't soft enough to keep her from blackmailing me. She wouldn't have minded picking up where we left off ten years ago. So I wasn't worried about her letting me in."

"Was it a date? Did she know you were coming?"

He shook his head. "No, but I knew she'd let me in. I stayed open till closing time Wednesday —that was one night I didn't want to close early and maybe have to explain why afterwards. I drove to the motel, knowing that if Amy wasn't there she'd be there within minutes, after the *Lode* closed. Across from the motel there's a stand of cottonwood, remember? I drove back in the shadow of it so my car wouldn't be in plain sight.

"But there was another car there already—one I recognized when my headlights hit it. I didn't *think* the owner of that

car would be with Amy, but I couldn't take a chance, so I backed off a way, thinking I might have to postpone things till the next night, but—"

"Whose car was it?"

"What does it matter? Why should I tell on the guy—on the chance that you'll have a chance to repeat it? Anyway, he came out in only ten minutes or so—and not out of Amy's place, but out of Birdie's."

"Birdie's! You mean that *Birdie—?*

"Why not? Birdie's not much past forty; she's still alive. And big women like Birdie appeal to some men more than skinny ones."

"Anyway, the guy left and I went to Amy's door and knocked. She must've been still awake because she came right away and asked "Cass?" When I said yes, she opened the door and let me in, closed it before she put on a light. Then she popped back in bed quick and pulled up the sheet. But not before I saw she was naked and knew the reason *she* thought I'd come.

"I didn't tell her it wasn't, naturally. But I opened the bottle of whiskey I'd brought and poured us drinks. And I sat beside her on the bed and—well, made toasts to old times and old friends to keep her downing drinks. God, how that woman could drink. I was damn near tight myself after a little while, and I hadn't taken a drink all day or evening while she'd been drinking.

"So—well, I did what I had to do. And she didn't even feel it. And then I searched her place. The poster wasn't there—hell, I stayed almost two hours, looking every *possible* place. I took along what little money I found and what other papers I found—nothing important—just to make it look as though the motive *could* have been robbery. And let myself out and—"

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "You'd never been to the motel before. How'd you know that trick of locking the door behind you with the key inside, and why— Wait, I can answer the *why*. The longer before she was found, the colder the trail would be. But how'd you know how to do it?"

He looked at me gravely. "A customer told me, a year ago. A customer named Bob Spitzer."

"Sorry I said anything. Go on, Cass."

"After I was out I remembered her car. And knew where it probably was. I hadn't taken her keys along and it was too late to go back in and get them, but I thought she probably didn't lock it except for the ignition and I could jimmy it open if it was locked. It wasn't, but the poster wasn't in the car either. So—well, that's all. I went home. And—"

Suddenly he stopped, stared at me. "Well, that's it, all of it. Now shut up. No more questions. I've got to think."

"No more questions, Cass," I said. "But I *can* convince you that you can't get away with—"

"Shut up!" he said. And he meant it, really meant it. The pistol came up just to the table's edge. "If you say another word I'll shoot—and that's part of the problem solved and I can concentrate on the rest. One more word and you make up my mind for me. Understand? Nod, if you understand."

I nodded.

And sweated.

Cass was sweating too. Even in the dim light I could see beads of perspiration on his forehead.

And I could almost hear the wheels go round inside his head. He could kill me easily, here and now, and in all probability get away with it.

"Another drink?" His question was so sudden that it startled me.

I should have answered diplomatically, yes or no. I certainly didn't want to get him mad at me. But I couldn't help it; it came out. "One for the road?" I asked him. "One for the road, like you gave Amy before you killed her?"

He got up and went around behind the bar again and started building two more drinks, husky ones, two ounces plus of whiskey in each glass. He added ice cubes.

He still had the gun handy on the bar, but he was being a little more careless about how long he kept his back toward me. I think he was *hoping* I'd make a break for it. He hated to kill me in cold blood for the same reason he'd hated to kill Amy while she was conscious. He was hoping I'd make a break for it, so he could shoot me on the wing, a sportsman.

Should I *try*? I didn't know how good a shot he was. Maybe I *could* make the door and get it open before a bullet hit me—

And then it happened, before I had to make up my mind. There was a sudden sharp rattle as someone tried the knob of the front door, and then a knock—a nice loud decisive knock—on the door's glass. And a shout.

I was on my feet and heading toward it as Cass's hand closed over the handle of the pistol. I said—and I think my voice was calm — "It's Charlie Sanger. Shoot now, if you're going to—while with him standing there it won't be taken for a backfire."

And walked on to the door, my spine prickling with expectation of a bullet plowing into it.

I turned the latch and was just opening the door for Charlie Sanger when the gun roared. And the bullet hit—but not me. In the split second after that knock I'd made the bet with my-

self, on which I probably had nothing to lose anyway, that Cass wouldn't shoot me under circumstances that wouldn't do him any good at all, wouldn't even give him a start on a getaway.

And I'd won my bet. In the few seconds it had taken me to reach the door, Cass had had time to decide that a bullet in the temple was a quicker and easier death than the gas chamber.

The Bar Sinister, Cass's neon sign, had saved me. When he'd made all the other motions of closing up, he'd forgotten to turn it off. If it hadn't been for that, Charlie might have tried the knob just to be sure Cass had locked up, but he wouldn't have stopped and rattled it and stood there. Or knocked. Seeing the neon light still on he'd stopped to knock on the chance that Cass, although closed, might still be inside cleaning up so that he, Charlie, could tell him he'd forgotten to turn off his neon sign.

Almost an hour later—and it still wasn't nine o'clock—I was at the police station, pounding out a statement and almost through with it. McNulty was there—it had taken him only minutes to dress and get down—reading over my shoulder as I typed. He'd tried to question me at first but I'd taken a minute out from typing to convince him that he'd get the whole thing faster if he'd just let me type it out, and that I was in a hell of a hurry because of Tom Acres' deadline. Unless he wanted me to call Tom first and give him the story and then— McNulty agreed to let me do it my way.

And then Hetherton was there —I never did find out who phoned him to tell him the story had broken—first skimming the pages I'd already typed and then reading over one shoulder while McNulty read over the other.

I finished with both of them practically leaning on me. I jerked the last page out of the machine and signed it. I asked McNulty, "Want me to initial each of the preceding pages?"

He said it might be a good idea, and I did it. Then I got up and headed for the door. McNulty had picked up the phone and was asking for the sheriff at Douglas. Hetherton was giving my statement a second and more careful reading. Nobody was paying any attention to me and I got out fast.

A minute later I was talking to Tom. I started to apologize for not having had time to write up and organize the story but he said, "Cut the chatter. Go ahead."

I was about halfway through when Hetherton came in. He went past me and sat down at his desk, sat quietly watching me and listening to what I was saying into the phone.

When I said, "That's it, Tom," Tom said, "Great work, Bob. I'll get you a good bonus for this—won't say how much till I've talked to the publisher, but it'll be all he'll sit still for. Or—if you're smart enough to have done that how come you're not smart enough to get that bastard Hetherton to fire you?"

I looked over at Hetherton, wondering if he'd picked up his receiver so he could be listening to both ends of the conversation, and hoping that he had. But he hadn't.

I said, "I might do just that."

"You *serious*?" Tom sounded half jubilant and half incredulous.

I said, "Maybe I am. I'll call you back. 'Bye now." And hung up.

I looked across at Hetherton. I said, "Hetherton, I've got a problem." It was the first time I'd called him Hetherton instead of Mr. Hetherton to his face.

If he noticed the change, he didn't comment on it. "Yes?"

I said, "I fudged a bit on one part of the statement I gave Mac. And on what I told Tom. It wasn't a lie; it just wasn't all of the truth. I said that while I was talking to Cass—before the trouble started—I suddenly remembered that I'd seen 'somewhere, sometime' a Wanted poster for a James Norcutt. What I *didn't* say was where the *somewhere* was, and you know as well as I that it was there—", I jerked my head toward the safe, "—and, as you've guessed by now, the *sometime* in question was this afternoon when you left me here alone with the safe open so I could give money from it to your wife."

"Absurd," he said coldly. "There's no such poster in that safe."

I nodded. "I'll believe that. When you heard this evening that the case had broken and that Cass had killed himself, your first thought would have been to come here first, before you crossed over to the police station, to destroy that piece of paper. I have no doubt that it's ashes now—and pretty finely pulverized ashes at that."

"Absurd," he said again. And added, "You can't prove it."

"I can't," I admitted. "So it would be my word against yours if I told about it. But there's another thing I didn't put in the statement, something Cass told me. It had nothing to do with the murder directly, though, so I was within my rights in not mentioning it.

"Cass told me that when he went to the motel Wednesday night, a man was visiting Birdie, and Cass waited till the man had left before he tapped on Amy's door. He recognized the man, but he didn't tell me who he was." I said, "Hetherton, you were that man."

Hetherton was getting into a rut. He said, "Absurd" again. But this time he added, "You are just guessing. It wouldn't even be a case of your word against mine."

"True," I said. "But even as a guess it becomes important when you tie it in with the fact that *you* had that *Wanted* poster. There's only one way how I—or anybody else—can figure out how you got it. Birdie snoops, and she'd have been more curious about Amy than about most of her guests. She'd certainly have given Amy's room a once over, and have found that poster. I'm guessing she didn't recognize it as Cass; she didn't know Cass very well. But it might have looked vaguely familiar to her and puzzled her to the extent that she 'borrowed' it from wherever Amy kept it and showed it to you the next time you had an assignation with her. And *you* recognized it, or you wouldn't have taken it from her. My guess is you didn't tell Birdie who it was, but on some pretext or other you talked her into letting you take it."

"That's all guesswork, Spitzer. You admit it yourself. And you have no proof at all. If you'd dare spread a story like that—"

"I wouldn't," I said. "I don't spread gossip or guesswork. But what I'm seriously wondering is whether I shouldn't tell McNulty —and tell again under oath at the inquest—the two things that I actually do know, the two facts that the guesswork is built on. One, the fact of where and when I saw the Wanted poster. Two, the fact that Cass told me he saw a man he knew but didn't name leaving Birdie's after one o'clock Wednesday night.

I had him sweating, and I knew my guessing had been right, down the line. His face hadn't changed, but there were slight beads of moisture on his forehead. He asked, "Is this blackmail, Spitzer?"

"No," I said. "I'm just fighting it out with my own conscience, whether I *should* tell those two facts that aren't guesswork, whether it's my duty to tell them or not. No matter what you offered me—and I hope you're not stupid enough to offer me money—or what you do for me, including firing me, I make no promises. But I'll admit that if I were off this paper, out of this town, not having to work for you any more and see you every day, I might *think* about it less. I'd have other things to worry about and think about. But here or elsewhere, I make no promises. The least you deserve is to sweat a while—and wonder how much I'm going to remember at the inquest."

He stared at me for a long moment and I stared right back. Then he said, "You're fired."

It was as simple as that.

THE saint's RATINGS

The pen is mightier than the sword

A thousand cocoanuts to that gentleman in the left balcony who concocted that little erudite gem. But, like the Queen in Alice in Wonderland, *"Off with their heads," cried our reviewer, as he grasped the sword and contemplated much of what had been written by those who wielded the pen.*

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

Three haloes: Outstanding

 Two haloes: Above average

One halo: Passable reading

 A pitchfork: For the ashcan

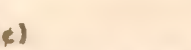
THIS IS COSTELLO ON THE SPOT,
by R. H. Prall and N. Mockridge (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Well written documentary of crime and gangsterism in the U. S. A. from the bloody days of Al Capone through the businesslike, twilight respectability of Costello and his international cartel of dope, gambling, prostitution, and extortion that today has replaced the old outmoded methods. It is a sad commentary on honesty that Frank Costello's friends seem to be mostly top-ranking judges and politicians.

THE CASE OF THE BODY BEAUTIFUL, by Jonathan Craig (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Convincingly told murder story. Satisfyingly free from the usual unbreakable, unbeatable, unbelievable, private eye. Mr. Craig has an excellent plot, police that seem real and police methods that sound authentic. Good to the last paragraph.

THE BABY DOLL MURDERS, by James O. Causey (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Involved plot that plays hop-scotch with murder, a baby adoption racket, semi-crooked civic leaders and various understood and misunderstood hoods. 

THE VOODOO MURDERS, by Mike Avallone (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Voodoo? Who do? You do. Do what? Shoot the author and yourself if you read this.

RUN FROM THE HUNTER, by Keith Grantland (Gold Medal, 25¢)

And if you are wise, you won't stop until there is no fear of this little story catching up with you.

loyal candidate

by . . . Arthur Somers Roche

Yes, the Congressman had won. The candidate was in. But now the wise and cynical old man had to decide what came next.

"THE Candidate just phoned," I said.

The congressman stared at me.

"Yeah? Now wasn't that sweet of him?" he said.

I stared at him.

"What's the big grouch about, Congressman?" I asked.

"What did he want?" he grunted.

"Asked when it would be convenient for you to call. Say, he was like a boy! Like a kid that's just got a bicycle for Christmas."

"I been thinking it was time you retired, Curtis," he said. "You're out of date. It takes an automobile to excite kids nowadays."

"And I'd like to know what it takes to excite you," I cried. "Here you've done what just couldn't be done. You've taken a dark horse and put him over. You deadlock a convention and let the leaders beat each other, and then —zowie! Did you read the editorial in this morning's Press? It says that political strategy like yours—"

"Yes, I read it," he cut in. "What do you want me to do? Give three cheers for myself? Say,

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This is not a mystery story, but is *a story of conflicting loyalties. We called Arthur Somers Roche's* FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY *(February, 1957) a piece of Americana. Here is another example of why Roche was unique in an era where dash and superficial glitter was demanded of the writer.*

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I hear the champion is neglecting his training. That's the way with them all. They don't know that the road to the top is slippery each way. Well, what else did you read in the papers?"

I looked at him hard.

"Say, Congressman, did you throw a party last night? I looked everywhere for you. Where were you?"

"In bed," he told me.

"You never got that head in bed," I said. "Holy mackerel, what a beaut I had! I ripped a flask out of my pocket when Pennsylvania ditched Maclane and came swinging into line, and I emptied it when Ohio asked leave to change her vote, and I took a jolt from Senator Manning's flask when Arkansas moved to make the nomination unanimous, and—"

"I read Ten Nights in a Barroom when I was a lad," he interrupted. "Well, I came back to the hotel and went to bed right after the Candidate started his speech."

"It was a lulu," I said. "In a tough spot, he was. There he was, standing on a platform whose adoption he had protested. If he boosted the platform he knocked himself. If he knocked the platform he still was hurting himself. And he came out of it the swell guy he is! He bowed to the will of the convention but preserved his own right to act and think as—"

"I've read it," he said. "Twice. Once when I wrote it and again this morning in the papers. Yeah, it was a good straddle."

"You bet," I said. "Well, I better ring the Candidate. When'll I say you'll be over?"

"Doesn't he know where I'm stopping?" he asked.

"Why, sure he does," I said. "Didn't he phone here just now to ask when—"

"Did he?" he asked.

"That's what I've been telling you," I said. "And you went to bed early, eh? And got that head from oversleeping, eh? Boy, what would you feel like if you'd had a party? Well, what'll I tell him?"

"Oh, ask him if he thinks the champion can make the weight," he said.

I bent over and squinted at him. I fanned myself with my Panama.

"You're not feeling so well, Congressman," I said.

"Well, you'll talk me into a hangover pretty soon," he replied. "As a matter of fact, I never felt better in my life."

"And why not?" I grinned at him. I knew something was wrong with him, and a little salve never hurts a sore spot.

"You practically made a President yesterday—"

"Oh, did I?" he asked. "Is that how the Candidate feels?"

"Well, how else would he feel? How would anyone feel? Day before yesterday he was the Honor-

able Whosis, ex-so-and-so. This morning he's the people's choice, the lad that triumphed over the machine, the white-haired boy that's going to retrieve the party's pristine glory, and—"

"Yes, I read the nominating speeches," he said. "I wore out two pencils cutting them down to the right lengths. So that's who he is, eh?"

I quit fanning myself.

"Well, for cryin' out— Well, who did you think he was, Congressman?"

"I thought he was the man who wanted to know when I'd call on him," he answered.

I'm not the dumbest man in the world.

He didn't make me attorney-general of my state because I was thick.

"So that's it, eh?" I said. "Say, Billy"—and I never call him Billy unless about to battle him—"you wouldn't act that way."

"What way? And why wouldn't I?" he asked.

"This way. I mean—Billy, the Candidate can't call on you."

"No?" He poured himself a cup of coffee.

"No," said I.

"He called yesterday," he reminded me.

"This is today," I told him.

"It always is," he said. He pulled up closer to his breakfast table. "Little Java?" he asked.

I shuddered.

"I took my breakfast out of a bottle. Say, you're not going to eat those cakes?"

"You didn't think I was going to pad my shoulders with them, did you?" he said.

I shuddered again.

"I wouldn't know what else to do with them," I told him. "I guess you didn't get lit last night, at that."

"Just my natural grouch in the morning," he said.

"Good Lord, don't put syrup on them," I begged.

"Don't look if your heart is weak," he chuckled.

"It ain't my heart. It's my stomach and head. Congressman, the Candidate is waiting to hear from you. He told me that he wouldn't make a single appointment until he'd seen you."

"O-o-oh, swee-eet," he said. "Get me out of the way first, eh?"

"Oh, listen, Billy," I said. "You can't act that way. Good grief, he's the next President of the United States."

"Oh, yes? There's a little matter of an election coming on, I hear. Am I right, or am I right?"

I whistled softly.

"So that's it?"

"So what's it?" he asked.

"Now that you've made the match for him you're not sure he can win, eh?"

He speared a wheat cake and sort of spun it on his fork.

"Sure," he said, "sure. And when I was managing pugs I al-

ways bet against my boys and made them lie down."

"Aw, Billy, I didn't mean that," I said.

"Then what do you mean?" he asked.

"Darned if I know what I mean," I cried. "I'm so balled up—I came in here to glad-hand you. I think I'll get three cheers and a tiger from you. You took the machine and dumped it on the scrap heap. And you act like you'd lost six straight races. Snap out of it, Billy. Shove back from that table—you'll get fat if you're not careful—and let's go over and see the Candidate."

"Mercy me!" said he. "Without letting him know we're on our way?"

"He's keeping time open for you," I said. "I'll phone him."

"Sure, phone him," he said. "Tell him I'm waiting right here for him."

I looked at him, not knowing what to make of him.

"But, Billy, you can't," I said. "He's the Candidate. You got him nominated and—"

"Yeah, me and Frankenstein," he said.

"Aw, be yourself," I pleaded. "Everyone calls on the Candidate. He doesn't call on anyone."

"I'm not anyone," he said.

I shook my head slowly.

"Billy, for the first time in my life—I'm not proud of you," I said, angrily.

"Now, don't you make me cry," he said. "I've got troubles enough on my hands."

"You'll have more if you act this way," I said.

"What way?" he asked.

"Good grief, do you think the disappointed lads are going to take it lying down? The Candidate can be elected—yes. But there's dissension—bound to be. The machine feels you put something over. The boys will be out boosting publicly, but—those favorite sons that thought they were going to get the nomination have friends, you know. The old knife is being sharpened at a hundred grindstones this bright morning, Billy. The least hint of a split between you and the Candidate—"

"Who hinted it?" he asked sharply.

He glared at me.

"Oke, Congressman," I said. "I'll phone the Candidate."

I whipped around on my heel and started for the door.

"I got phones here," he said softly. "Save you a lot of steps if you use one of them."

Last night's celebration had stolen some of that schoolgirl complexion from me, but I could feel my cheeks burn now.

"Have it your way," I said.

I walked to the nearest phone and picked it up.

"Outside, please," I said. "General Curtis speaking." I heard him snort as I named myself. He was always kidding me about the way I like that military title that

my office gave me. At that, though, I've noticed that he still likes to be called Congressman, and he hasn't held office for twenty years. We all have our weaknesses. "Give me the Candidate," I said.

"I want to speak to the Candidate," I said a moment later. "This is General Curtis . . . W-e-ll, how's the Candidate?" I asked. "No, don't thank me," I said. "I just did my little bit to help bring the party back to the high, bright road from which it wandered, sir. The magic of your name—"

"Save it for the stump," the congressman cut in. "It'll go swell on the radio. Tell him I want him."

I could feel even my ears go red. The Candidate asked a question.

"The congressman, sir?" I said.

"Why, I'll tell you, sir, he's a shade indisposed this morning. He wondered if you could possibly find it convenient to drop in any time tod—"

The congressman stirred the sugar in his coffee until I thought he'd break the cup. His eyes were plenty angry.

"He wishes to know," I cut in on the Candidate's expression of sympathy, "if you could come over here? What? Right away? I'll tell him, sir."

I hung up.

"What a man," I said. "No swelled head about him. Coming right over. Terribly sorry you're not feeling well—"

"Yes, I gathered I'm ill," he said. "Or maybe it's the swelled head?"

"Maybe it is," I said.

And with that I walked to the door, and my stride was stiff. I felt as though my legs were made of icicles and might break under me. I'd known the congressman twenty years and he'd never acted like this before.

"That's right," he said. "Meet the Candidate outside and explain that while I'm a little out of sorts, you're in the friendliest mood, and—"

I wheeled instantly.

"Billy, what in blazes is the matter with you? Do you think there's anything in the world would make me rat on you?"

"Secretary of the Interior is a swell title," he said.

I could feel the red leave my face.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Do you mean that—that the Candidate—"

"I wouldn't offend him," he said. "It's in his mind. And Secretary Curtis sounds a lot sweller than Attorney-General Curtis, eh?"

"The Cabinet," I whispered.

"Why not? That is, of course, if he's elected."

"If he's elected? Have you any doubt?"

"A lot of things can happen in four months," he said. "I mean—

a few wrong moves—getting people sore at him—"

I took some steps toward him.

"Billy, are you sore at him?" I asked.

"Well, suppose I was?" he asked.

"But you couldn't be," I said. "My God, Billy, you made him. And doesn't he know it? They tell me that last night he just about broke down. Said that he'd never forget what you'd done for him. Said he'd never dreamed that such loyalty and devotion could exist in politics."

"Yeah, that's in the papers, too," he said. "And this morning he wants me to call on him."

I came right close to him.

"Billy! You are sore! Why, I wouldn't believe it if I didn't see it and hear it! You—you're small, Billy."

"Oh, am I? And you've just found it out, eh?" he said. "Well, when you can choose between a big man and a small man, there's only one choice, isn't there? You'd better go outside and meet the Candidate on his way in. Of course, everyone will be handshaking him, but if you break a couple of his knuckles he'll remember you. Secretary Curtis. It sure sounds swell."

I tried to read his face, but gave it up. I sat down.

"Oh, I guess I'll stick around, Congressman," I said.

"The ship may be sinking," he said.

"That's the second time you've hinted I'd rat on you," I said.

"Well, it isn't only rats that leave a doomed ship," he said. "There are passengers too, you know."

"And there's the crew," I said. "The crew sticks." I lighted a cigarette. "You don't mind my saying, Billy, that I don't get you, that I think you're the biggest disappointment in my life?"

"No," he said. "I don't mind anything, Secretary Curtis." He smacked his lips. "If I were you, I'd do a lot of thinking, Curt."

"Oh, would you?" I said. "And if I were you maybe I'd do the same."

"And then we'd both have headaches," he said.

The phone rang. He picked it up.

"The Candidate's outside? Send him in," he said. He hung up and looked at me. "He'll be here in ten seconds," he said to me, "Secretary Curtis."

"You speaking to me?" I said. "I hate public office."

"Then you won't mind not holding one," he said.

Then he called "Come in," as a knock sounded on the door, and in came the Candidate.

Looking at him, it was hard to realize that he was fifty-three. To me he was just the fresh-faced young lawyer that had come to see the congressman twenty-five years ago, and told him that he thought

it was his duty to try and clean up local politics.

Told that to the congressman, who had been mussing up local politics for fifteen years even then. Till I die I'll never forget how I laughed when he left the congressman's office, and how the congressman had turned to me and said, "I like him. I'm going to put him over."

Like a son he'd been to the congressman, and like a father the congressman had been to him. He'd got him every office in the gift of the state. Assemblyman, state senator, congressman, governor. And not once, in that quarter-century, had the congressman asked him to do a single thing that an honest man couldn't do. Oh, a little straddling, a little tact, maybe. But nothing more.

This is no brief for the congressman. He'd put his fingers, plenty, where his fingers didn't belong. But not where the Candidate was concerned. You know how it is. Everyone wants one clean, fine thing in his life and—well, that's what the Candidate was in Billy's. He had two records. One was his public record—and if you want to hold noses, folks, why, go ahead and do it. But the other was the Candidate's record, and if there is anything finer in this generation, I'd like to hear of it.

And there he stood, a little heavier through the shoulders, his hair gray now, but with the same fine upstanding way about him that he'd had twenty-five years ago. There was a look of concern on his face. The door closed behind him.

"Why, Congressman," he said, "I thought I'd find you in bed."

"That was Curtis, always a diplomat, you know."

The Candidate came farther into the room. He smiled—you know that smile of his, that's so friendly and honest.

"Well, I'm glad you're not really ill," he said. "No sick man eats wheat cakes in the morning. And I wanted to see you before I saw anyone else. I wanted to tell you how grateful I am to you, how much I owe you."

"Oh," said the congressman. "Wanted to pat the faithful old dog on the head, eh? Well, that was nice of you. I just thought you were sending me orders to report."

"Sending you orders?" The Candidate flushed. "Why, Congressman, how on earth could you think—"

"Oh, I been around a long time," said the congressman. "People forget the ladders—"

"Billy!" The hurt reproach in his voice made me squirm. I don't know how it affected the congressman.

"Oh, I'm not saying you would," said Billy, "but—you know how it is. You're the Candidate now, the party's leader, and

—besides, I didn't want any crowd around when we talked. If I called on you, there might be other people there, and—you see, they might think I was giving you orders."

"You never have, Congressman," said the Candidate. "Suggestions, yes. Plenty of them, and all good. Why, that speech I made yesterday—you read it over, made changes, practically rewrote it. And I don't mind anyone knowing things like that about you. You're my friend, my advisor."

"Well, that's fine," said the congressman. "I'm glad you still feel that way. I got an idea you'd changed a bit overnight. But, as long as you haven't—well, here's what I want you to do. I want you to go from here to the convention hall and let the boys know you want Peters as your running mate."

"Peters?" I gasped. "Why, Billy, they wouldn't nominate him for Vice President."

"Why wouldn't they?" he asked.

"My God, it would be suicide for the ticket!" I cried. "He's been wet; he's been dry. He's been for high tariff; he's been against high tariff. He's trimmed on every subject that ever came up."

The congressman turned to the Candidate.

"Now that Curt has quit horning in—what do you think?" he asked.

"I think Curtis is wrong," he replied.

"See?" Billy grinned at me.

"But," went on the Candidate, "I wouldn't run on the same ticket with him. He's strong enough with the voters, no matter what Curtis thinks. But he's yellow; he's a liar. I won't have him."

"Oh, you won't have him, eh?" said the congressman. "Well, I want him."

The Candidate smiled.

"Well, that's one little thing you won't insist upon, I hope. Billy, I wouldn't run with the man."

"No? You'll do as I say," cried the congressman.

"Good God, Billy, are you crazy?" I said. "You can't give orders to the next President of the United States."

"Who says I can't?" he demanded.

The Candidate looked at him. There was sorrow, there was pity in his fine eyes.

"I say you can't, Billy," he said gently. "Why, Billy, I'd feel dishonored running with Peters. If his nomination meant certain success for the ticket—I'd not accept him. The thought that—something might happen to me, and that that man would sit in the White House—it can't be, Billy."

"Well, it's going to be," said the congressman. "You take Peters, or you lose me. Take Peters—and take him quick—or I'm

through as national chairman. Go get someone else to run your campaign. Get out of here and, by God, don't ever come back. And don't ever send for me. Telling me what you will or won't do, eh? Me, that's made you President."

"Wait a bit, Billy," he said. "I'm not President yet. And if I am elected—it will be the people who put me in the White House. After all, they'll be the ones. I tell you, Peters is a crook. It isn't known, but it's a fact. I won't have him."

"That goes?" asked the congressman.

"It goes," replied the Candidate.

The congressman reached for the telephone.

"There's fifty newspapermen outside," he said. "Say 'yes' to Peters, or I call them in and tell them I've resigned from the chairmanship, from the management of your campaign. And what I won't tell them is that I hope to God I never see you again. I'm telling you that, though."

"Billy!" I screamed. "You've lost your mind."

He didn't look at me.

"Well?" he said to the Candidate.

"You're asking the impossible."

"You'll ditch the man that made you, eh?" said the congressman.

The Candidate looked at me.

"Curtis," he said, "you're his friend. Tell him that I can't do it. Curtis, you're going to be in my Cabinet. Tell him that you don't want a man like Peters in the government."

"Secretary Curtis," said the congressman softly.

And I stared hard at the Candidate.

"I'm stringing with the congressman," I replied.

"But you said yourself it would be suicide to run Peters—"

"It doesn't matter what I said, sir," I told him. "What the congressman wants—I give him."

"And I'll have my orders obeyed—or else," said the congressman. "I made you, Mr. Candidate. I might be able to unmake you. Take Peters—or take the consequences."

The Candidate looked at him.

"Billy," he said, "I'm sorry. I won't take Peters."

"If it means the White House?" asked Billy.

"If it means the Kingdom of Heaven," said the Candidate.

"Then get out," said the congressman, "we're through."

"We're through," said the Candidate.

He walked through the door and it closed behind him. And twenty-five years of devoted friendship went with him.

I shrugged.

"Well, there goes the election," I sighed.

"Think so?" said the congressman.

"I know so," I told him. "If

you split with the Candidate, with all the favorite sons burning up—unless—" I stared at him.

"Unless what?" he asked.

"I didn't know you and Peters were so close," I said.

"He's a good man," he said.

"You're a good liar," I said.

"And what do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"It's just leaking through my thick skull," I told him. "Why, I've heard you talk about Peters. You know he's no good. Yet you split with the Candidate—you know what I think?"

"Thinking is bad for men with hangovers," he said.

"The hangover's what's made me dull this morning," I said. "I know what's in your mind. You're a boss. It was all right while you stuck to our own state, but—the country's something else, eh? And you know you'd be a swell target for the other side. And you know that the Candidate will hurt himself by defending you, by telling how much he owes you. You knew he wouldn't ditch you. He's too loyal. So you ditched him. And you picked Peters to make him get his back up—and damn you, Congressman, you tried to get me sore at you."

"Why, you must have been drinking last night," he said.

"You wanted me to get that Cabinet post," I said.

"It isn't too late now," he said.

"Isn't it?" I said. "Thanks for reminding me. But, Billy—you can't split with the Candidate. You've just arrived at national control. You've run the party in the state for years—now you're the big boss—why, if you split with the Candidate—it finishes you."

"And starts him," he said.

I puffed at my cigarette.

" 'Greater love than this'—Well, you're making me sentimental, Congressman."

"And that's a tougher job than making a President," he grinned. "Better send for the newspapermen. Tell them that my health isn't equal to the strain of the campaign and—well, what else, Curt?"

"That ought to do," I said. "Lord, you were rough with him, Congressman."

"It was the only way," he said.

"Sure, I suppose so," I agreed. I reached for the phone. "Well, I'd better send for the newspapermen."

"You'd better," he said.

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kidnapped alphabet

by . . . MacKinlay Kantor

Professor Philo Combs had never anticipated that one day he'd get involved in such unacademic matters. . . .

ALPHY EMMY was missing.

Nobody knew whether he was dead or alive, or where he had gone in either event. Some people were greatly worried about it. Others were greatly worried lest the report prove untrue, and Alphy Emmy return on Monday morning to the peaceful, snow-covered campus.

The *Mahaska City Monitor*, deposited on front doorsteps along with another gust of snow before supper, put the startling intelligence into screaming banners:

DOCTOR EMERSON MISSING
FEAR FOUL PLAY IN DISAPPEARANCE OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

To the chubby-faced, white-haired woman who moaned on the shoulder of various cousins in the old red-brick mansion opposite Brewer Hall, it was: "Dear Johnny! Oh, if I only knew where he was!" To the cousins themselves it was, "Well, what in thunder is your theory? Old J.Q.A. never acted like this before." To fluttering trustees grouped in the executive offices of the university it was, "No, we have no further report

When an extremely proper Professor is kidnapped, it may not be news, but the kidnapping of the eminent Professor John Quincy Adams Emerson, head of Mahaska University, most certainly is that. Here is this story of crime in sedate places by the distinguished author of ANDERSONVILLE.

From: *Real Detective Tales*, December-January, 1928-1929.
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regarding the disappearance of Doctor Emerson. A conference will be held this afternoon."

Assorted newspaper reporters, speeding from St. Louis and Chicago and Des Moines on assorted trains, were pounding out advance kidnapping stories on the mysterious recession of Dr. John Quincy Adams Emerson, LL.D., Ph.D., and president of Mahaska University.

Among the smouldering youths and ladies who loafed between classes in the syrup-scented confines of the Owl Drug Store, Harry's Tea and Toddy, or the Travel Inn, a general tone of pleasurable mystery was apparent. "We hope to God it's true," they seemed to say, with backward visions of certain rulings anent football and proms. "Old Alphy Emmy! Alphabet Emerson—half the alphabet in front of his name and half behind it! Could we do without him? And how!"

It seemed that on Wednesday evening, Dr. Emerson had driven to the residence of his bosom friend, the Rev. Felix Hyde, of St. James Episcopal Church, for the purpose of discussing Mithradates and a smuggled bottle of muscatel. Afterward, the Rev. Hyde admitted that both Mithradates and the muscatel had come in for prolonged consideration, even to the hour of 1 A.M. Mrs. J.Q.A. Emerson was not accustomed to wait up for the return of her learned husband from such midnight forays, and only with daylight was it discovered that Dr. Emerson's bed was economically unused and Dr. Emerson's sober sedan was still parked in front of the rectory.

In an anguish of foreboding, Rev. Hyde declared that the university president had left the rectory at one o'clock, and that he himself had seen him enter his machine. His were the last eyes to rest on that familiar, portly figure. Vehemently he denied that Alphy Emmy had imbibed muscatel to any reckless degree; neat mathematical steps across the snow-covered parking were an added proof of the learned man's sobriety.

A wild day was spent in scouring the suburbs, telegraphing friends in distant cities, questioning railroad agents and nightwalkers. Then, at evening, a copy of *Commentaries On Persian Antiquity,* bearing the president's own book-plate, was found deeply rutted in the slush of a lonely road ten miles west of Mahaska City. Local officers rushed to the scene; the sheriff swore in more deputies, and bloodhounds were dragged from their kennels; state troopers rode forth bedight for battle. All to no avail.

The student council organized a searching party; class officers made tearful and impassioned pleas; the profane called after the mackinawed crew, "Don't look too carefully!" But by Friday evening,

when no further clue had been discovered, when AP and UP correspondents gathered in hotel lobbies, and old Doc Hammer went out to attend Mrs. Emerson through an hysterical night, the tone of even the most ruffianly was softened.

"Poor old Alphy Emmy," they were saying as they rubbed their billiard cues. "Hope the old goat didn't fall through the ice, or get kidnapped."

Shortly after 10 P.M., a dark car went hissing past the campus and a brick was tossed to the front porch of the red mansion. Someone of the cousins found it a few minutes later, and went inside to examine the note tied around the missile.

"You have till Saturday night to get him back," it read. "Leave ten thousand dollars in currency in the R.F.D. mailbox at Zion Hill. Then keep all the cars off the roads for two miles around that corner, or you can get a new boss for your college."

Philo Combs laced up the leather cords of his tall shoes, struggled into a heavy slip-over sweater, and began to search around the laboratory for his fleecy gloves.

"The possibility of a determination of sex by the close examination of the chrysalis," he meditated, "has never been satisfactorily exploited."

He gathered up a bag containing his lunch, pulled a round wool cap over his ears and closed the door of his laboratory behind him.

All over Mahaska City, people had been garbing themselves in dirty-weather clothes and carrying lunches to the woods for the past three days. They had been going to search for J.Q.A. Emerson.

But Dr. Philo Combs, professor of invertebrate zoology, was not intending to search for J.Q.A. Emerson. Scarcely did he realize that the worthy president had disappeared. The newspaper accounts and campus gossip made little impression on his camphor-soaked mind. Instead, he was setting forth on one of his weekly field trips; he looked like a benign owl, with spectacles and woolly cap, though even a benign owl would hardly wear tweed knickers and orange-topped stockings protruding from leather boots.

Infinitely more fascinating than any man-hunt would be this field trip of Philo Combs. For in anticipation of the experiments in *Sexual Selectivity Among the Saturnidae,* which he would make next spring, he was gathering quantities of cocoons. The common moths—*Samia Cecropia, Telea Polyphemus* and a few others. His activities would lead him into the thick forest, ten miles west of town, near the spot where the vanished president's book had been found. But Philo Combs was not thinking of books and vanished

presidents. He was thinking only of his bugs.

Out in the driveway, a rusty Ford coupe awaited him. It was a fine day for a winter field trip; thin snow was melting into golden water under the warm noon sun, and icicles splintered, tinkling down from the eaves to fall around the scientist like tiny knives.

With much heaving he managed to spin the engine and piloted his Ford slowly down the driveway. Directly across the front sidewalk the motor spluttered and died. Combs jerked on the choker. The engine coughed again laboriously, and gave itself up to a sodden wheezing.

The professor opened the door and climbed out.

"I think," he said aloud, "that I have it flooded."

"What's that?" said somebody.

Philo Combs glanced quickly behind him. The speaker was Thomely Blair, whom the professor regarded as a most reprehensible sort of person because he was the protege of President Emerson. Alphy Emmy had always possessed some protege. Blair was the least prepossessing of the lot; a gaunt, wide-toothed person who was always leading in student-faculty enterprises, and who was cordially disliked by most of the other students and professors. He was reputed to be a wizard in the study of Grecian literature, and traveled closely under Alphy Emmy's shadow like a classical pet dog.

"I remarked," stated Combs coldly, "that my engine was possibly flooded."

"Oh," Blair remarked. He was a bleak, scholastic figure in his long overcoat; beside him the professor might have been a clown. Then, "Are you going out to hunt for him, too?" asked the student.

"Hunt?" echoed Combs. "I am about to make a field trip. Hunt —for whom?"

"Why, President Emerson, of course."

"Indeed," said the professor mistily, "are people hunting for him?"

"Where have you been living for the past three days?" shouted Blair fanatically. "The entire state is aroused. Doctor Emerson is being held for ransom! His wife is going to draw ten thousand dollars out of the bank to redeem him! He may be murdered!"

Combs lifted his rusty, narrow brows. "Is he worth that much?"

"What?" squawked the model student in indignation.

"I mean," the professor hastened to add, "has he that much money?"

Blair swept him with a penetrating glance. "Of course, I don't know. It is just gossip. Doctor Emerson—er, that is, I have never heard him speak about money."

"If anybody ever did," said Philo Combs, "you would be the one."

Thomely Blair stared angrily. "I don't think, Professor Combs, that this is any time for raillery." He wrapped his overcoat around his bony shape and went striding off down the sidewalk.

The carburetor had dripped its surfeit of gas, and the Ford whirred merrily as Combs spun the crank once more. He climbed in and drove off along the avenue, passing the president's protege with a disdainful flourish of his horn. The mind of Philo Combs went fluttering back for an epithet of his boyhood days. "Teacher's pet!" he thought of yelling. But he didn't; he merely turned the corner at Rainbow Road and drove over the east bridge.

Of course, he had fully intended to go west and rake the underbrush along Millard's Woods for dangling cocoons. But the words of Thomely Blair had reminded him that other people would be seeking that same stretch of woodland today. Students, policemen, dogs, state troopers, what-not. It was near there where Emerson's book had been found in the road. It was near that point where the ransom was to be deposited. He remembered now; the *Mahaska City Monitor* had issued a special edition that morning, and Professor Combs had scanned it over his toast and coffee. . . . Very well, if the forces of law were infesting the western woods, he would drive east. He despised meeting people while pursuing his scientific expeditions; a large gallery gave him the fidgets.

He pointed six miles east through the skidding slush, and turned off the graveled road along a narrow, rutted lane. The car bounded like a lame jack-rabbit, but the professor clung to his steering wheel with true rodeo adaptability. His car was used to visiting odd places.

One mile along this lane, and a wide wooden gate blocked the way.

Beyond the gate, all should have been a smooth stretch of melting snow winding along under the barren branches of oaks, unmarred by any tracks save those of rabbits or birds. But instead a succession of ruts, marked by the transverse pattern of tire chains, led into the forest.

Philo Combs saw those tracks and frowned. "Hunters!" he said to himself. "Not only one hunter, but possibly numerous hunters. You shall have to use caution in venturing through the underbrush, Philo Combs. They might mistake you for a bird, or a rodent."

However, it was well into the afternoon and he could not spend the time necessary to find another ground which promised good results. He hung a small haversack from his shoulder, stuffed a thick sandwich into the fold of his sweater, drew a tattered blanket over the radiator of his Ford, and started south along the fringe of

timber, skulking methodically through bushes inside the barbed wire fence.

The growth was composed of choke-cherry, wild crab, and gooseberry bushes, all clustering with their thorns and interlaced twigs under the elms and oaks. Dry leaves, curling and frozen with winter, held a false promise to the searcher for cocoons, and Combs had progressed for half a mile before he found any prize. Then it was a fat *Polyphemus* cocoon, dangling from the branch of a haw tree. Nearby he found another, soon afterward discovered two *Cecropia* cocoons among the watersprouts of maple trees. But with this success, luck turned from him. He moved methodically along the forest during another hour and was unrewarded for his efforts.

"This will not do," thought the professor. "Is the result of this expedition to be measured by four lonely specimens?"

He sat on a stump and pondered while he munched his sandwich. This belt of woodland, although not as promising as the forest west of Mahaska City, had often brought him much better returns than now. He needed many more cocoons in order to have a large hatching in the spring. Classwork would prevent frequent field trips during the winter. Surely—

"I have it!" He leaped from the stump, choking over a last morsel of sandwich. "The grape-house!"

Certainly, the grape-house. Why hadn't he thought of that before? The dense undergrowth and vines surrounding that spot would undoubtedly yield him a good harvest of insects. Some years before, an optimistic horticulturist had undertaken a grape-growing project on a lonely slope in the center of this forest. Open fields led down to the river, sunlight was benevolent, but the grapes had not prospered.

All that remained of the enterprise was a tangle of barren vines in the center of a clearing, surrounding the cottage where the grape-farmer had lived. Philo Combs had often passed that way while conducting some class on a field trip.

He trotted away through the woods until he came to the winding forest road, and turned down its course toward his goal. Behind him, there arose the sound of an approaching car. For a moment the professor's mind was stricken with fear for his trusty Ford, but the sound was that of a larger machine.

"More hunters," he growled. "If they see me, they will wish to stop and put annoying questions. I will conceal myself."

He scrambled into a dense tangle of vines a few feet from the road. The car came closer; it jolted around a turn in the road and bounded toward him. From this thicket, the professor peered

out in amazement at the machine as it ground past.

A dark sedan. A familiar, much-used sedan, which he saw on the streets of town every day. And Thomely Blair was driving!

The car whirred out of sight around another bend in the road, and Combs came out to stand in the middle of the track and stared after it.

"Strange," he remarked softly. "Thomely Blair has seldom evinced any sporting inclinations. . . . I wish—I wish I had a car like that. But of course, his father is a wealthy plumber. . . ." And then the shocking truth seemed to leap upon his mind like a gigantic cat. "What is Thomely Blair doing *here?*"

Alphy Emmy missing. Held for ransom. And Thomely Blair, his cringing confederate, in full possession of all knowledge concerning the president's personal habits. It would take no famous sleuth to realize the kidnapper's identity!

Warily, menacingly, Philo Combs stepped into the bushes and began his cautious approach. "I do not like you, Alphabet Emerson," he thought. "You have cramped my department and my salary. But I will save you. Yes, I will save you for the honor of Mahaska U!"

He came to the edge of the clearing, and from a safe vantage point behind a thicket, surveyed the grape-house. No smoke rose from its tottering chimney. Solitude and desolation seemed to brood over the wintry trees and snow-laden vines. But wheel tracks led to the rear door, and Thomely Blair's car was parked outside.

"He has not seen me," the scientist reasoned. "He will not expect visitors. I shall creep up to the car and incapacitate it. I shall *drain the gas tank.*"

Using weeds and broken trellises as cover, he crept slowly toward the car. The grape-house lay before him, apparently unoccupied. Thomely Blair would be busy giving food to his captive—or perhaps torturing him. Perhaps Thomely Blair was a degenerate; some people had always thought so. Combs imagined a scene wherein President Emerson writhed beneath the cruel hands of this maniac, but try as he might he could not stir up an answering wave of compassion.

He gained the shelter of the car. No sound had come from the dismantled cottage. The windows were boarded up solidly, and no one inside could discern his stealthy approach. As Combs bent down to crawl beneath the sedan and fumble for a death-blow at its vitals, his haversack swayed forward and struck him smartly on the knee.

The professor jumped. "My gun!" he exclaimed softly. "I had forgotten my weapon."

Surely enough, he was well-armed. Some months before, he had been badly frightened by the presence in one of his favorite hunting grounds of Bull Scarlatti, mail-robber and murderer. True, Scarlatti had been captured by the officers even while Professor Combs trussed up a drugged policeman on the theory that he had caught the fugitive. But he did not seek the society of armed criminals. Since that time he had purchased an automatic pistol, and carried it always in his knapsack. He had never fired a shot from it, but doubted not that the weapon was wholly murderous.

A fanciful ambition swept him. Why be content with crippling the car and speeding back to town for assistance? Why not, instead, seize kidnapped and kidnapper in one fell swoop? It would be the depth of ignominy for Alphy Emmy to be rescued by the entomologist whom he had always disdained.

Grimly, Combs drew the pistol from its receptacle. "I shall take them," he vowed.

He strode boldly to the back door. It was of solid wood, and his advance could not be discerned through any panel. Gun in hand, he stopped beneath the porch and took a deep breath. "For the honor of Mahaska!" he thought fiercely.

Then he jumped to the step, seized the knob and swung the door open with a crash.

President J.Q.A. Emerson, LL.D., Ph.D., et cetera, sat cross-legged on a pile of cushions, wrapped in a warm coat and eating a sandwich held in unmanacled hands. Beyond him Thomely Blair crouched on a cracker box, an open newspaper across his knees. Between them ran a line of black stove-pipe, in which the strong blast of a plumber's torch was radiating comfortable warmth.

"I have you!" cried Professor Combs exultantly, his pistol boring toward Blair. "Fling up your hands at once, sir!"

"Oh, Doctor Emerson," bleated Thomely in a dismal whine. "It's that awful little Professor Combs!"

The president of Mahaska University could only blink and spit forth bits of bread in undainty surprise.

"Call me awful once more," menaced the entomologist, and I shall be apt to shoot you dead!"

President Emerson found his voice. He lifted his bulk from the cushions, with a manful attempt at dignity. "Professor Combs!" he stuttered. "Ahem! Professor Combs—this is a very strange proceeding!"

"It is indeed," chanted Philo Combs, "but you are now safe. And this Blair ruffian shall be handed over to the authorities at once."

Thomely whined again, but his cowering appeal was drowned in the oratory of his idol.

"Ah-huh, I see that you are laboring under a misapprehension, Professor Combs. Ah-huh—that is—well, the whole progress of events is somewhat distorted. In fact—"

Blair managed to make himself heard. His face worked with wretched fear. "Oh, tell him!" he shrieked. "I won't be put in jail! Professor Combs, it's all a hoax!"

"Hush that squawling," said Emerson to the unhappy little Thomely.

"I will not hush," Thomely returned in anguish. "I guess I don't want to be put in jail. You see, Professor Combs, it's like this. Doctor Emerson wanted to go to Athens next year, and he wanted to buy a lot of new books and lots of things, but his wife won't let him have any money. She controls the purse-strings—"

"I'll have you expelled!" thundered the eminent educator.

"Don't be silly. You cannot have me expelled. I would tell everybody. . . . So you see, Professor Combs, Mrs. Emerson wouldn't give the doctor any money—wouldn't for years—and he was desperate. We arranged this kidnapping. He would return and say he had been captured by unknown bandits, but he would have the ten thousand dollars safe in his pocket! He—"

Emerson's face was livid. "You young fool!" he roared. "You sophomoric idiot! I should never have trusted you!"

"—and that's about all there is to it, Professor Combs, and please put away that pistol. It is pointed at my stomach. There. . . . Well," and he turned to his elderly colleague in appeal, "he had us here, didn't he? I should have been warned when I saw his car by the gate. But I never thought he'd come to the grape-house. Everyone was searching west of town, where I dropped your *Commentaries*. . . . I guess we had to tell him, didn't we?"

Emerson sighed and sank back to the cushions. "Perhaps you are right, Thomely. There was no other course."

Philo Combs still held his gun, but it was pointed at the floor. His glance went from one face to the other, and as it rested finally on the plump visage of his superior, a cold light came into his own small blue eyes.

"I, too, will have something to say," he remarked quietly. "What I have to say is this: you will probably wish to return to town and say that you evaded your captors. Very well. But if you wish me to keep this impossible escapade guarded, I must be paid. I must be paid well."

"Blackmailer!" muttered Alphy Emmy. "All right. What is the sum?"

"A new laboratory for our department," stated the professor. "An adequate appropriation for equipment. And—an adequate salary for myself. An increase of

at least one thousand dollars per annum."

"Blackmailer!" again muttered the president treacherously. "Suit yourself, Combs. But remember, we must have silence."

"You shall have silence," agreed Philo Combs with cheer. "And I shall have a new laboratory. Now, I will go back to my car. Perhaps it is just as well that you both return to town at once. Good-day." He opened the kitchen door, stepped outside and closed it behind him.

Forty feet away from the house, some tremor of caution warned him to stop. He paused a moment, considering. Then he ran lightly back across the snow, approached a window at the end of the kitchen, and put his ear against a crack in the solid layer of protecting boards.

". . . Preposterous," Alphy Emmy was saying. "Our plan was the acme of perfection. And it was ruined solely by that man."

Thomely Blair's voice came in a dull whisper. "It need not be entirely ruined, Doctor Emerson. Of course, we shan't be able to collect the money from that mailbox west of town. But we can spike the guns of Professor Combs. Isn't my story just as plausible as his? We'll tell them that I found you and rescued you. Everyone must believe that: his tale would appear absurd beside our account."

"By Jove!" Emerson's chuckle was moist and pleasant. "I believe that you've hit it, Thomely. And I can corroborate your statement. He won't have a leg to stand upon!"

Professor Combs turned away from the window and stumbled drearily across the snow. Yes, it was true. They were two witnesses to his one. His story would certainly sound fantastic. They had him. It was no use. His dreams of a decent laboratory and equipment, of a better car and better income for himself, must all vanish like the snow under his feet. The world was full of such people. Double-crossers, the newspapers termed them. He was beaten. Nothing to do but go to his car and drive home. He—

"Hello!" somebody said.

He started and glanced up. Two hunters had come out of the brush and were smilingly regarding him. One of them held up a mittened hand and displayed two dangling cottontails. They beamed with sturdy pride.

They were laborers from the city. Their mackinaws were old and ragged, their shoes were scratched and soaking, but in them Philo Combs saw the glimmer of a final justice. His brain reeled savagely. "I'll do it," he swore between clenched teeth.

He darted forward fumbling in the pocket of his knickers for his purse. "Listen to me," he spoke rapidly. "In that house are two criminals. They are worse than

criminals. They have perpetrated an evil hoax. But they shall face justice. Now! You must be my witnesses. Come with me. I will pay you well! Are you coming?" He whirled and darted toward the grape-house, trembling with eagerness and rage. The hunters followed silently.

"Pay?" asked one of them lucidly.

"Certainly," gasped Combs. "Follow me!"

He charged through the door again, the ragged men after him. Emerson and Blair were gathering up the stove-pipe and cushions.

"Men, are you listening?" Combs hissed at his companions. "Then listen well! Doctor Emerson, do you now deny that you and Thomely Blair are confederates in a kidnapping scheme, for the purpose of securing money for a trip to Athens?"

Emerson and Blair stared at the professor. His pistol was in his pocket, but the pocket pointed at them. "He's a fanatic," whispered Emerson between dry lips. And then aloud, "No, I do not deny it. What Professor Combs says is true. Whatever he says is true."

"And you, Thomely Blair?" his wild gaze rested on that cowering unfortunate.

"It's true!" squealed Thomely. "Yes, it's the honest truth. We did intend to put one over. But you caught us!"

With triumph in his eye, Combs withdrew his hand from his pocket and turned toward the door. "Follow me, men," he ordered.

The hunters strode behind him, their guns under their arms and cottontails bouncing from their belts. Around a turn in the wood road they paused, grinning at Combs.

The little entomologist, still trembling, drew out his purse. It contained the balance of his month's living allowance, but at that moment he felt very prodigal. He extracted two five-dollar-bills and handed them to the delighted laborers.

"Coercion was necessary," he said with gravity. "And you were guardians in an emergency. I am deeply grateful for your services, but doubt if you will be called upon to substantiate my story. They will deny nothing, now. And I shall have my laboratory."

Still grinning, the men pocketed their money. The taller one struggled to speak. His words came at last, with fluent cadence.

"Tenks, meester," he said. "So nice. Five-a doll! So nice! No spik much Ingliss."

death in the dressing room

by . . . Carter Dickson

Someone was humming dreamily —until the moment the door was open, and then she began to scream, loudly, shrilly.

THE lights were dimming when Jim Matthews entered the Orient Club. The hot, smoky room swallowed him up as though he were padded into layers of cotton-wool. Following the headwaiter, he groped among the tables in a darkness faintly lightened by the white of table covers, of shirt-fronts, of women's shoulders.

Then the drums began.

They drowned the stir and mutter which never deserts a night club, as though the echo of all the voices in the world were imprisoned there. The drums began with a kind of tom-tom beat, growing deeper and more rapid. A blue spotlight appeared from the other side of the room. It touched the polished dance floor, it touched the edge of the orchestra from which the drums were now thundering. It allowed Jim Matthews to see that the headwaiter was bowing him to a table. True enough, the table was in a very good position on the edge of the dance floor. But it was occupied.

A girl in a white fur wrap looked round, startled, as they appeared. She was sitting alone at a

Carter Dickson obviously needs no introduction to any mystery reader. Here is another of his remarkable stories about Colonel March and his strange Department of Queer Complaints which, as March once said, does get the weirdest cases — including this murder of a nightclub dancer.

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table for two. The blue spotlight allowed Jim to make out only that she had brown hair and wide-spaced eyes and that by her clothes she was clearly not one of the girls of the house. On the table stood an unopened bottle of champagne, with a placard reading "Reserved."

Not a word was audible under the noise of the drums. To the girl Jim Matthews tried to convey apology; to the headwaiter he indicated the "reserved" placard. That dignitary lifted his shoulders in a broad and hideous shrug, and in pantomime indicated that all the other tables were full. Jim, though he hated making himself conspicuous, argued back in pantomime. The headwaiter leaned close.

"Miss Rapport—she *dance,*" he hissed.

He stabbed his finger urgently towards a curtained doorway, through which the star of the show was due to appear. He almost pushed Jim down into the chair, and then he disappeared.

What exasperated Jim Matthews was that the headwaiter had paid absolutely no attention to what the girl at the table might think about it. He had not even looked at her. The matter wasn't of any importance, maybe; but Jim was already beginning to dislike the manners of the Orient Club. He glanced across at the girl in the white fur wrap.

"Sorry," he shouted.

He thought that she smiled and shook her head. Then they both looked back at the floor again, for Francine Rapport was beginning her Javanese temple dance.

Jingling faintly, a figure in a high, weird headdress moved into the blue spotlight. "Francine Rapport," though born in Holland and brought up in New York, was purely Oriental in her good looks. Her face was almost unrecognizable in a mask of paint, with lines drawn upwards from the outer corners of the eyes and accentuating them, a stolid mask. She was small, her skin amber in color; the body well-rounded, but of a muscled litheness. Her costume, of large metal ornaments, glimmered under a light coating of oil. Her hands moved up that costume, grew taut above her head, descended with the palms outspread, and the dance began.

Jim Matthews reminded himself that he was not here to watch Francine Rapport. Yet he probably knew more about her than most of the patrons did. She must be into her forties, after a knockabout career with Tony Caplin; but she did not look it. Jim wondered where Caplin was tonight. He half got up from his chair—and saw Caplin, proprietor of the Orient Club, standing by the orchestra platform on the edge of the spotlight.

This was the moment when the girl in the white fur wrap slipped away from the table.

Well, it was no business of his. He watched her moving away into the darkness between the tables, in the direction of the orchestra platform. He sat down again. The tom-tom beat of the drums had quickened; the string music crept more insistently; and it came to Jim Matthews, as clearly as though he had heard an alarm bell, that something was going to happen.

Francine Rapport was afraid. He had no idea of what she was afraid, though anything was possible at the Orient Club. But it showed even in the rhythm of the dance, in the turn of her fingers or eyes, as though the fine body were really that of a priestess threatened by the temple god. So perhaps it was as well that she finished the dance a second too soon; and, a second too soon, the lights of the Orient Club flashed on.

They showed Jim Matthews that the girl in the white fur wrap was on her way back to his table. She had been moving quietly. But she started a little, caught out by the lights only a few feet away. She was just opening her handbag to slip something inside. She slipped it inside, and the handbag closed with a click, but not before Jim had seen what it was. It was a man's leather pocket-wallet.

Under the roar of applause that went up for Francine Rapport, Jim looked into the other girl's eyes. She was stooping slightly forward, as though to hide both the wallet and her own handbag. Her face was flushed dull red. On the dance floor, Francine Rapport was bowing to the applause; then Francine turned and ran for the curtained doorway to the dressing room. Chairs were pushed back. The orchestra, with a preliminary throat-clearing from the saxophone, burst into a lively dance number. And the girl in the white fur wrap, imitating the movement or thrown into a panic by it, lost her head and ran. With a muttered exclamation Jim Matthews got to his feet and followed her. After all, it was what he was there for, wasn't it?

Couples were taking the floor, looking unreal in the thick, smoky haze. They poured out to such an extent that Jim was caught as though in a football rush. From a microphone issued Tony Caplin's rich, hollow voice. "The boys are playing for you—" Jim dodged through, keeping on the white fur wrap. It disappeared through the curtained doorway to the dressing room. He reached the doorway only thirty seconds later; but the girl had gone.

Beyond was a passage in which he saw several doors, all closed. It was badly lighted, dingy, and full of the scent of stale powder. He met nobody. The whole house seemed to shake to a measured stamping over the music; but it might have come from another street. Then a door at the end of the passage opened; the girl in

white came out and closed the door softly. She breathed as though she had been running; she adjusted her wrap before she turned around.

And Jim Matthews stepped in front of her.

"Excuse me," he said.

"Yes?"

She spoke coldly, with sudden calmness. Tony Caplin, Jim thought, knew how to choose his employees. This girl was a limb of the Orient Club, probably as skillful in the crafts of blackmail as Francine herself; but she could have passed anywhere. Both her features and her voice had that fine-drawnness which is supposed to indicate breeding; her brown eyes and the arch of the eyebrows showed cold wonder as she looked back at him.

"Would you mind telling me," Jim continued, "what you were doing with that wallet you put in your handbag a minute ago?"

"Wallet? Really? What wallet?"

"Oh, stow it," said Jim. The way he spoke was caused by mingled anger and disappointment. "I'm a police officer, miss."

This startled her, no less than the stolid tone he had deliberately adopted. He saw in her face incredulity, doubt, fear, and growing underneath them, a certain amusement.

"Really? I see. You're one of those people who have a terribly good time and then arrest the management for selling drinks after hours."

"I have nothing to do with that." He tried not to speak hotly. "I only ask you, would you mind explaining what you were doing with that wallet?"

"So I suppose I shall have to tell you. I picked it up off the floor. Oh, yes, that's quite true. Not being able to appreciate the charms of Miss Francine Rapport, which evidently stagger you men so, I went out to the bar during her dance. On the way I picked up the wallet. Naturally, when the lights went on I wanted to find the proper owner."

"Then why didn't you?"

"What on earth do you think I'm doing here? Miss Rapport, I understand"—she spoke with a degree of quiet hatred—"is part-owner here. I am sorry if the proper procedure is to stand up on a table and shout that you have found a wallet. *I* thought of taking it to Miss Rapport."

"And did you give it to her?"

For the first time the girl's eyes shifted.

"No. She—she isn't here. Evidently she didn't come back here after her dance. Perhaps you'd be good enough to let me pass so that I could take the wallet to Mr. Caplin? Come with me, if you like. By all means."

Someone was humming dreamily. Along the passage strutted a good-looking maidservant in cap and apron. Carrying a dressing-

gown over her arms, she gave them a pleasantly impudent look as she wormed past to open the door.

The girl in white made an attempt to get away. Jim saw the intention in her eyes; he closed his fingers round her wrist. Just at that moment the door was opened and, after the fraction of a second, the maid screamed.

"I didn't do it," the girl in white cried. "I swear I didn't do it!"

Even from the doorway they could see it. In an untidy dressing room of pseudo-Oriental garishness, Francine Rapport sat at a dressing-table before a mirror ringed with lights. She lay forward across the table, her elaborate headdress awry. Her back was bare except for the fastenings of a broad metal breastplate, which winked and glimmered under a film of oil. The bangles had slid down from her arms like coiled snakes. And she was not a pleasant sight, for she had been stabbed through the back with a pair of long and narrow-bladed scissors.

Still gripping the wrist of the girl in white, Jim went in. Murder! A murder case for the first time in his short police experience. He felt a slight physical queasiness. The woman had died very recently; and, despite the clumsiness of the weapon, from a direct heart wound. There were no signs of disorder on the dressing-table except that a sandalwood box was open and a fragment of paper was pressed in the dead woman's contorted fingers.

Faintly along the passage from the dance floor, hollow and soothing out of a microphone, drifted Tony Caplin's rich voice: "A selection of o-old, old favorites, beginning with the immortal 'Bye-bye, Blackbird.' Let her go-oh, boys."

Jim turned to the maid.

"Who are you?"

"Me? I'm Paula." In an extremity of terror she pressed her hands to the sides of her head in an old gesture of her ancestry.

"Her maid?"

"Eh?"

"Miss Rapport's maid?"

"Yes, *sir*. Who wants to know?" She glared at him.

Jim told her. "Were you here when she came back from her dance a few minutes ago?"

"I wasn't! I wasn't, and I can prove I wasn't! She gave me a message to take to Mr. Caplin, to come and see her when she'd finished her dance, and that's what I went and told him. And—"

"Steady. Do you know which is table number sixteen out there? Right, then. At table sixteen you'll find a big, heavy-set man; sandy moustache, short hair, speckled kind of face. His name is Colonel March. Ask him if he can come in here, but don't mention this to anyone else. Got that?"

When the maid was gone, Jim bent closer to the dressing-table. It was easy to make out a few words written on the fragment of paper in Francine Rapport's hand: *"like this. Ever your adoring—Tommy."* The smooth, clean fingers, with their nails dyed purple, held to this as they held someone even in death.

Jim Matthews did not touch anything. This was not the concern of Department D-3. He and Colonel March were at the Orient Club in search of a super-pickpocket, and they had evidently found her; but someone has to take charge when a pickpocket tells lies within ten feet of a murdered woman. He led the girl in white to a chair.

"Let me have your name and address, please."

"I'm sorry. I can't tell you that."

Jim shut up his notebook. "That's your privilege," he said. "I also want you to understand that you're not bound to answer any questions I may ask you. But if you'd only realize—"

"I don't mind answering your questions," said the girl, and the tears started in her eyes. "It can't be much worse for me than it is, can it?"

"Then why didn't you tell me you knew she was dead?"

"Do you think I'm insane? You'd only have thought exactly what you did think. But I didn't kill her. I came in here, and found her dead, and came out again. That's all I know. All I wanted to do was get away. I don't expect you to believe that. I probably shouldn't believe it myself if I were in your place; but it's the truth."

She sat back in the chair with an expression of cool despair.

"Then what about that wallet?"

"It's Tony Caplin's wallet. You might as well know that now."

"You stole it?"

"No. Don't worry. I'm not going to assume a pose of injured innocence, or jump up and fly into a tantrum: as she used to do." Her eyes moved towards Francine. "But I really didn't steal it. He dropped it. He dropped it, I tell you!"

"Have you still got the wallet? You'd better let me have it, then."

An expression of cynicism came into her face, a kind of pleasure as though in some ironical secret. If he had not seen her other expression when she was off guard, he could have believed her. Without a word she opened her handbag, took out the wallet, and handed it to him. It was of plain black leather, without name or initials, but its contents were damning enough. This was no ordinary wallet: it contained, neatly folded, a thousand pounds in fifty-pound notes.

They were startled by an exclamation from the doorway. Tony Caplin was staring with a sickly

look at the woman sprawled across the dressing-table.

Even those who knew Caplin's crookedness, of his innate viciousness, were compelled to admit his charm. He went through the world with the manner and voice of a perpetual radio announcer. Not bad air or drinks or late hours seemed to impair his alertness. His wiry dark hair, his pleasant light eyes and close-shaven jaw, made him look like an advertisement in a chemist's window. But all this was gone now.

He said: "Who are you?" And then, in a higher key. "My God, what is it?"

"Steady, sir! Don't touch anything!"

Caplin had hurried to Francine. He touched her shoulder, and then he began to beat his fist into his palm in a kind of frenzy.

"She's dead," he said.

"Yes. We—"

"They got her," said Caplin. "She was all I had. Who did it? Tell me who did it and I'll kill him! I mean that." He whirled round towards the girl in white. "Who's that? Who are you?"

All this time Jim Matthews felt that the girl was studying Caplin. He could not interpret her expression. But she appealed to Matthews.

"At least"—she spoke with quiet urgency—"you can clear up one thing. I mean, about that wallet. Mr. Caplin can clear it up: it's his wallet. I saw him drop it. And can tell you who I am, too; he can vouch for me."

Jim held it out.

"Is this your wallet, sir?"

"To hell with the wallet," snarled Caplin. Then he blinked, and his bewilderment grew. "What wallet? Where? What are you talking about?"

"Does this belong to you?"

"Certainly not."

"And I suppose you'll say, too," insisted the girl in a soft, steady voice, "that you don't know me either?"

Caplin spoke with a sort of desperate courtesy. "Madam, I don't know what you're talking about. I do know that Francine's dead. I loved Francine. I come in here and find her like this, with a pair of scissors—" He stopped, his face working as though he were going to weep. "—and all you people can do is babble about a wallet, wallet, wallet. No, I don't know who you are. I never saw you before in my life. Did you kill her?"

"Did *you?*" the girl asked him cooly.

The other had got a grip on himself.

"I've done a lot of things in my life," he answered grimly. "To judge by the number of police in the place tonight, they think I've done a lot more. But there's one thing I didn't do. I didn't kill Francine. I never left that orchestra platform from the time she

was dancing until one minute ago."

That was true. Jim admitted it to himself; and so, by the look on her face, did the girl.

"Fifty people will testify to that. For once in my life," muttered Caplin, a savage and surprised look coming into his eyes, "for once in my life I'm in the clear when dirty work's been done. And *this* kind of dirty work. This kind!"

"Quite so," agreed a new voice. "This kind."

It belonged to Colonel March. The seventeen stone of Colonel March filled the doorway. His thumbs were hooked in the pockets of his white waistcoat; he was as bland as ever, but his eye looked wicked.

"Hello, copper," observed Tony Caplin—yet without offense.

"Good evening," said Colonel March.

"Come to run us all in?"

"No," said Colonel March seriously. "I've telephoned the divisional station about this. They will take charge. I really came to break up your newest and, I think, most ingenious racket."

"I don't understand that," said Caplin sharply.

Colonel March studied him. Behind that huge façade there was a kind of admiration.

"My good Anthony," he said, "confound you for a genius! You don't use guns. You don't use knockout drops. You don't even need a chucker-out. Your weapon is psychology." His grin became broad and sinister. "Wherever the Orient Club opens up, as it does fairly frequently, you have some new and foolproof device for separating the gullible from their money. Paris and New York testify to that. Here you are more subtle; but you've got a real jewel. It took me several days with a wet towel round my head to decide what it was."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Pocket-picking in Futurist style. Pocket-picking in which the guest doesn't even know he's been robbed."

As though casually, Colonel March went over and stared down at the body of Francine Rapport. He did not seem concerned with it. He went on speaking without looking at Caplin or the girl.

"Not ordinary pocket-picking," he assured them. "That's much too dangerous. All guests at night clubs have a drink; some have a tolerable number of drinks; still others (I think the fact is well known) have too many drinks. So there would be too much of a row if the pocket-picking were discovered even once. And a whole epidemic of it would put the Orient Club in very bad odor with its customers. But there is a better way.

"Now, a man with a good number of drinks inside him seldom remembers exactly how much money he has got in his wallet. When he totals it up at the end of

the evening, and finds three pounds or a fiver less than he expected, he simply assumes that he must have spent it himself. Just as we all do. Certainly he never thinks of his wallet being lifted; lifted and deftly returned, minus as much as the Orient Club thought he could spare without noticing it. The method is harmless and very nearly undetectable. But the takings at the end of the week must be enormous. Mr. Caplin, I congratulate you."

There was a pause. Jim Matthews could not read Caplin's face.

"He's gone off his head," Caplin said critically. "I don't think you can prove what you're saying."

Colonel March turned round from the dressing-table.

"I'm afraid not," he agreed. "Just when we were trying to prove it, this young lady butted in."

"So," said the girl in white, "you think I'm a pickpocket?"

"No," Colonel March said. "I think I know who you are now, though I don't blame Matthews for being taken in. Your name is probably Joan Forsythe. You live in Kensington, at an address I can't for the moment remember, and you have a brother named Thomas in the Diplomatic Service. I can also guess what you were doing with the wallet."

The girl sprang to her feet.

"You did not take it from anybody," he told her dryly. "On the contrary, you were trying to give it to somebody. To Mr. Caplin, in fact. Would you mind telling me, Matthews, exactly what happened here?"

His face was sardonic as Matthews explained. He took the wallet and held it up before the girl.

"Ah, yes. I see. This contains the blackmail money that Caplin and Rapport wanted from your brother for his affair with Miss Rapport. Gad, what a reminiscent note! You were instructed to hand the money to Caplin in public, in the presence of witnesses, in a wallet, and with the covering words: 'This is your wallet, isn't it?' You went to give it to him by the orchestra-platform; but at the last minute you lost your nerve and tried to fling it at Miss Rapport instead.

"That's another of their games," Colonel March added sadly. "The one they tried in Paris."

All Caplin's bounce and energy had come back to him. His eyes were still a little hysterical, like those of an actor who has played an exhausting part. But he did not seem to take offense; he only shook his head skeptically.

"You're going too fast, my friend," he suggested. "You could get into trouble, you know, talking like that. *I* don't know what you're talking about. But then you're telling me, aren't you?"

"Is he?" said the girl through her teeth.

For a second or two she did not seem to know whether to feel relief, or anger, or an even worse despair. But it was a slipping of the glazed determination, which showed a very human being underneath; human, and a little petulant.

"You've seen Tommy," she flared out at Colonel March.

"Not exactly, Miss Forsythe. He came to us last week; and then lost his nerve and refused to set a trap. There was nothing else we could do about it."

"Well, what else could I do? I had to get back those letters Tommy wrote her. It wouldn't have mattered two-pence, don't you see, if Tommy hadn't been in the Diplomatic Service? But he's got a wonderful opportunity; he'll be sent to Paris or Rome if nothing happens. He won't help himself, and I—well, I—"

"Look here," muttered Jim Matthews, "I seem to have made an ass of myself again. Sorry, sir."

"Why should you be sorry?" asked Joan Forsythe. "You may not have caught a pickpocket. But how do you know you haven't caught a murderess? Look there. Look in her hand. Look at that piece of paper, signed by her adoring Tommy. That's torn off one of my brother's letters; and our wonderful Mr. Caplin knows it as well as I do."

"I don't know what Francine has been up to," said Caplin: "About letters, that is. If she wanted to sell some letters, that was her business. But if there were letters, where are they now?"

Colonel March took the question with great seriousness. Again he bent over to peer at the letter, unfolding the fingers so that he could look at the smooth, soft palm of the hand as well. The hand and arm seemed to interest him as much as the fragment of paper.

"Well, Miss Forsythe?" he asked over his shoulder. "Did you get the letters?"

"No, no, no! I've told you before—I told you," she appealed to Jim, "that she was dead when I got here. I was only here half a minute, anyway. I haven't got any letters; you can search me if you like. *He* had the letters. He probably still has them."

"I never had any letters," said Caplin.

Joan Forsythe pulled herself together. She studied Caplin in a curious way; and she spoke in a new, detached, wondering tone.

"You know," she said, "you really are a nasty bit of work."

"That may be," agreed Caplin frankly. "We're none of us perfect, not even you. But you see, Miss So-and-So, you're in a jam. A bad jam. You ought to understand that, for your own good. And, honestly, you oughtn't to be so free with your accusations.

Now, I'm not in a jam at all. I didn't kill that poor kid; I couldn't have killed her. The coppers themselves will tell you I never left that orchestra-platform at any time."

The girl appealed to Colonel March. "Is that true?"

"It is quite true, Miss Forsythe."

"You see?" said Caplin.

"No, I don't see," answered Joan Forsythe, in the same puzzled voice. She made a gesture. "What I can't get over is a kind of cheap meanness about the whole thing. It doesn't seem big or terrible or even tragic. It only seems grimy and mean. My brother isn't any persecuted figure who's guilty of a lot of high crimes. But just because he can't afford scandal, and goes out and makes a fool of himself over that woman, they're all ready and waiting to make money out of it. They're so used to helping themselves at other people's expense that they don't even see anything very strange in it. They only say to you, in a surprised kind of way, 'Well, of course you'll have to pay now for what we know, so pay up and let's have no more nonsense.' "

She drew a deep breath.

"Maybe they're right. I don't know. All I know is that it cost Tommy and me nearly everything we've got to scrape that money together. There must be lots of poor fools like us. I don't know whether you believe what this man tells you; but you seem to. Whatever you mean to do to me there'll be a dreadful scandal at the end of it; and poor Tommy in the middle. The clever ones of this world have it all their own way, haven't they?"

"I think not, Miss Forsythe," said Colonel March.

And they all looked at him.

The abrupt stillness in the Orient Club, a sort of clang of stillness, reached farther than this dressing room. The music of the orchestra, after wobbling, had stopped in the middle of a bar. The mutter of voices from the dance floor, after rising abruptly, had died away; and Jim Matthews knew why. The crowd had seen police uniforms at the front door.

But Colonel March, his arms folded, did not seem to notice.

"You," he said sharply, turning his head towards the door. "Paula, I think your name is. The maid. Come in here, please."

Paula obeyed. She entered like a cat: not straight, but moving round the corner of the jamb. Though she did not seem nervous, there was defiance in her full-rounded eyes.

"Paula," Colonel March repeated. "Paula, Paula. Haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

The reply was fired back quickly.

"Maybe you have. I was at the Tin-Hat Club, two, three years.

And at the Odalisque for six months."

"I have never been at the Tin-Hat Club. No: haven't I seen you more recently than that?"

Paula shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, we'll omit that," said Colonel March in a curious voice. "How many dressing rooms are there here, can you tell me?"

"Two besides this, sir."

"Any other cabaret turns besides Miss Rapport's?"

"No."

"And the girls—I mean, the dance-hostesses: did they change in these rooms?"

Caplin was about to intervene; but Paula, keeping her eyes full and hypnotic, got in before him. "No. Other side. Miss Rapport wouldn't let them."

"When did you last see Miss Rapport alive?"

Paula snatched at this. "I passed her when she came off the floor, that's what. She gave me a message for Mr. Caplin."

"So you have an alibi, too. Just one other thing," observed Colonel March, with sudden politeness. We came here to look for a very good pickpocket. So we may as well be thorough. Let me have a look at your hands, will you, please."

"My hands?"

"Both hands."

She hesitated, flashing a look at Caplin; but she stretched them out.

"If," said Caplin, "you're saying Polly had anything to do with killing Francine, you're wrong. Fifty witnesses can prove it. She was out on the dance floor the whole time. And if you're saying she's a pickpocket, you must be completely off your nut." Then he shouted: "What do you think you'll find on her hand, anyway? Beeswax?"

"No," said Colonel March. "Only oil. And you're quite right: she was out on the dance floor the whole time."

Paula jerked away her hand as though she had burnt it. But Colonel March still had her gently by the other arm; and he did not let go.

"We've noticed several things about Francine Rapport," he went on. "She performed her Javanese dance in a blue spotlight, and with her face done into such a grotesque mask of paint that nobody could recognize it. But note the color of her skin; and compare it with Paula's. Note her height and build; and compare them with Paula's. Yes, Paula was on the dance floor, impersonating Francine in the temple dance, while Francine lay dead in this room. And, if you don't want to be accused of the murder yourself, young lady"—he swung a screaming Paula round to face him—"you had better admit that your friend Caplin stabbed Rapport with the scissors just before she was due to come out for her dance."

Tony Caplin tried to wrench her away from Colonel March, and shake sense into her. But she was a bad accomplice. She had convicted both of them before the Divisional Detective-Inspector reached the room.

"The trick," Colonel March said to Joan Forsythe and Matthews afterwards, "was simple enough; and very easy to perform without a hitch. Our ingenious Mr. Caplin, who thought he deserved all the good things of life, was fed up with Francine. She was a nagger. She was ageing. She wanted too much money. So the partner had to be eliminated.

"It was easy to train Paula in the routine of the dance, as he had trained Francine. It was easy to manage the substitution; there were no other cabaret turns at the Orient Club, and nobody else came near those dressing rooms. Paula could be seen, of course, only in her make-up, the headdress hiding her hair, and in that dim disguising blue spotlight. She could not be seen close at hand. When Francine had just finished changing into costume a few minutes before the dance, Caplin stabbed her while Paula was getting into a duplicate costume in an adjoining (empty) dressing room.

"Paula came out, locked the door of Francine's room so that no one would discover the body too soon, took the key with her, and went out to dance. Afterwards she returned, unlocked the door, got into her ordinary clothes in the empty dressing room and was ready to appear in a very few minutes. All this time, of course, Caplin was preparing an impregnable alibi. That was the purpose of the whole scheme; and it entailed an alibi for Paula as well. Caplin was ready to swear to her presence near him should anyone question her.

"They did not particularly care who found the body. But I am certain they never intended *you* to find it, Miss Forsythe. On the contrary, Caplin must have been rather sick when you did not approach and hand him his thousand pounds. Afterwards, with the police there, he could hardly claim it when by an unfortunate mischance suspicion was plumped down on you. He never intended that scrap of paper to be found in the victim's fist. He asked for the letters from Francine, stabbed her as she was taking them out of that sandalwood box, and unfortunately tore them from her hand too quickly. So he had to attack you in order to protect himself."

Colonel March looked away musingly.

"Since we found the letters on Caplin, they won't be any trouble to your brother in the future. But I give you my word you were never in any great danger. It was plain from the first that there had been a very deliberate substitution of identities—"

"From the first?" demanded Joan Forsythe. "But how?"

"That's what I should like to know, sir," agreed Jim Matthews, with a certain gloom. He looked at the girl, who laughed.

"They forgot the oil," said Colonel March. "You may have noticed the coating of oil put on all those large metal ornaments to give them the blurred, mysterious gleam in imitation of the real temple dance. The dance consisted of a series of evolutions with the dancer's hands and arms pressed flat against her body or brushing it. We saw that. The palms of Francine's hands, and her arms, should have had a film of oil from brushing against the ornaments. They hadn't; we saw that too. Still, it was clear before then. Francine Rapport had been doing that dance for a long time. She could not have forgotten the quality called tempo. She finished her dance too soon, with the orchestra going wild. I did not know who the dancer was. But I hardly thought it could be Francine."

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the christmas murder

by . . . Dorothy Quick

THE warm smell of baking filled the kitchen of the white clapboard house. Sarah King, who took pride in her home as well as her cooking, sniffed happily and regarded the cookies already lying on her kitchen table—small Santa Clauses in rows on waxed paper. A photographer with all equipment could have made a fine angle shot of these rows of rotund little men with white beards and ermine trimming on their red jackets. Widow King was noted as a decorator of cakes and cookies and she'd never done a better job.

She was running over in her mind the people she was going to give the cookies to on this Christmas morning—Mrs. Ellen Ware, her nextdoor neighbor, some half mile removed, next there were innumerable small boys who loved the "cookie lady" as she had come to be known—then there was poor Jessup.

There were great dark bruises on her neighbor's throat, and one hand clutched pitifully at a scrap of colored paper.

The doorbell rang, a sharp, penetrating sound oddly at variance with the peaceful kitchen and its friendly aroma.

Dorothy Quick, poet and novelist, returns with this unusual little story which reflects her warm interest in people. This murder on Christmas morning seems so pointless, so without reason. It takes a year before a neighbor, and others, realize Christmas had a special meaning for the killer.

The bell was followed by a gentle knock.

"Bennie is early this morning," Mrs. King said aloud as she crossed the kitchen toward the door. "It's a good thing I've been up since six with my baking or his cookies wouldn't have been ready."

She threw open the door. It *was* Bennie, the town idiot whom she had always befriended. Every day he came for a cookie, and in return sometimes ran errands for her. Bennie stood in the open doorway smiling that aimless smile of his. His eyes, as usual, were opaque with little dancing lights of anticipation.

"Cookie" he said in a low, thick voice, "Christmas cookie."

"Come in, Bennie. It's cold outside." A lovely carpet of snow covered the ground. It was a real New England Christmas and Bennie looked like one of the figures in a Grandma Moses painting come to life. He had a heavy plaid Mackinaw and a bright red cap and scarf.

He seized the cookie she gave him, fondled it and admired the colors. "Pretty, pretty," he said, over and over. He looked sixteen but actually was twenty-two.

Finally he ate the cookie with gusto and held out his hand, "More."

Mrs. King gave him another cookie, then, while he was eating it, wrapped up a dozen in the waxpaper and put them in a bag. "For your mother and you," she told him slowly and distinctly as she always did when speaking to Bennie, to make him understand.

"For mother," he repeated as he took the bag and cradled it carefully under his arm. The big, hulking man was as gentle as a kitten, and he handled the bag as though it were the finest glass. "For mother," he repeated, then turned his eyes full upon her. "More for Bennie. Bennie wants a bag."

Sarah hadn't intended giving him any more. If she did it would mean more baking for her, but weighed against the look in his eyes, and the pathos of his underdevelopment, a little extra cooking wouldn't hurt her.

She scooped up another dozen of the gay, fragrant Santas, wrapped them in the oil paper, produced another bag to put them in and handed them over to Bennie.

He took them as carefully as he had taken the others. Holding the bag in his free hand he smiled at her. "Bennie thanks. Bennie says Merry Christmas." He turned to the door and waited patiently for her to open it.

Tears welled in Sarah King's eyes. The boy—or man—was pathetic. She wished she could help his mentality instead of feeding the great, useless body.

She patted him on the shoulder. "Merry Christmas, Bennie,"

she said and threw open the door.

It was snowing again, great heavy flakes. She watched him move into them unwillingly with a lump in her throat. When he had vanished in the snow, she shut the door.

Her warm kitchen and the rows of cookies cheered her. Everyone else on her list was well able to enjoy them, but actually she supposed they meant more to Bennie and his poor mother than anyone.

She busied herself with her work. It wasn't long before the tables were filled with bags of cookies—a dozen wrapped in oiled paper in each. She put the bags on a large tray that she kept for her yearly cookie distribution.

Then she got ready for the outdoors.

She was fifteen minutes later than usual. The clock hands showed quarter past eight instead of eight, but that wouldn't matter. The children wouldn't notice time on a day like this. She'd go to Ellen Ware's first. She always did. They were such friends, widowed in the same year and closer because of it.

Well wrapped against the weather, she started out with her tray. It was still snowing, but despite the falling flakes it was bright. The country was beautiful and looked as though it were wrapped in cotton wool. Each tree was a Christmas tree decorated in snow. On the branches drops of water glistened like diamonds. Other trees were decked with shining icicles, brilliant against the snowy sky.

When she reached Ellen's she went directly to the back door. She knew Ellen would be getting her dinner ready. Her son and daughter and their two boys, as well as Sarah, came for the noon meal.

Sarah rapped on the door. And while she waited for Ellen's hearty "Come in" picked up three bags of cookies, one for Ellen and one for each grandson. When there was no answer Sarah tried the door. As she had guessed, it was unlocked, so she pushed the door open and went in with her cookies.

The smell of turkey cooking filled her nostrils, but the kitchen was empty. She put the cookie bags on the table and saw a few crumbs lying there.

Ellen was probably "readying up" the dining room. Sarah went through the swing door. The dining room was empty, so she went on to the parlor.

The first thing she saw were Ellen's cards proudly displayed on the mantel, the nearby table and then—her eyes found the floor. Lying in a crumpled heap in front of the fire, half behind the big wing chair which had hidden her at first was Ellen! A horrible distorted Ellen, with a

blue face and a swollen tongue hanging from her mouth. There were great, dark bruises on her throat, and one hand clutched pitifully a tiny scrap of colored paper. It was the corner of a Christmas card she had evidently been putting up on the mantel.

It was only then Sarah realized her friend was dead—murdered!

She heard herself screaming. She knew the screams were ripping out of her throat and that she couldn't stop.

When she finally came to herself again it was to find the room filled with people and Ellen's body with its dreadful face decently covered.

The neighbors had heard Sarah screaming. They had come and sent for the doctor, Amos Burgh and the sheriff, Sid Garting. The doctor had given Sarah an injection before he had even examined Ellen. One look at her tortured face was enough for him to know there was no life left.

Sarah was his main thought then. Eventually the screaming had stopped. Amos wanted her to go home and go to bed, but Sarah said she couldn't bear to do that, "Not until I know," she had shuddered and mercifully he had left her alone.

Sid had taken over after that. "Did you see anyone or anything?" he asked. He had to know and from long experience he thought Sarah was better talking. It was her natural bent.

But for once she had no conversation in her. "There wasn't anything—not a footprint—no disturbance of any kind. The snow was smooth as velvet. By the time I'd reached the porch my own prints were obliterated. Inside everything, except for a few crumbs on the kitchen table, was neat as Ellen's kitchen always was. It wasn't 'til I reached the living room—" She began to shake.

"There, there," Sid patted her shoulder soothingly. Then, more to distract her than because he thought there'd be an answer, he questioned, "Had Ellen any enemies, was there bad blood between her and anyone?"

"Only Cyrus Brent." Sarah stopped short, aghast at what she'd said.

Sid pricked up his ears. "Cyrus Brent? He can be mean but he ain't no killer."

"Of course not. They were only arguing about a bill. Ellen thought he'd over-charged and Cyrus felt he'd been generous."

"The old skin-flint?" Despite the seriousness of the situation, Sid smiled. "I'll check his alibi, but I feel it will come to nothing."

Sid's feelings were quite right. His friend's alibi was perfect. He'd been opening Christmas presents with his wife and chil-

dren since six o'clock that morning.

The obvious theory that Ellen had fed a tramp accounted for the crumbs and the murder, but nothing in the house had been disturbed and the little jewelry Ellen had was in its place. Search as they could they found no trace of any tramp.

Seldon was a small village. Anyone coming in from outside would have been noted unless it was someone who came early in the morning and asked for a bite of breakfast which Ellen would have never denied.

This was the accepted theory, but Seldon didn't quite recover. Its citizens locked their doors at night though they never had before.

Sarah locked hers. She was afraid. Ellen had been her best friend and Ellen's loss left a void in her life. The Christmas murder was a horror it took her a long time to get over. But time achieves wonders and when next Christmas came, Sarah made cookies again, more than usual, by seven o'clock.

She hadn't been quite able to face up to Santa Clauses, so, this Christmas, she made angels. In shiny, white icing dresses, with golden belts and haloes. They were really quite pretty, she thought, as she did them up in waxed paper and bags, leaving two out for Bennie, who would be along presently. He came every morning at a quarter to eight. She couldn't go out to deliver the cookies until Bennie had come. She couldn't disappoint the pathetic creature, so, to pass the five or ten minutes, she sat down by the window and looked at her Christmas cards.

At first, remembering Ellen, she had avoided looking at her cards. Then she had overcome her reluctance and now, as she looked at the messages from her friends, she realized how comforting they were.

She was glad Ellen had had the pleasure of hers on that last day. If only they knew how and why she had been killed, her loss would be easier to bear. As it was, the unsolved mystery was a maggot eating at the heart of everyone in Seldon.

Sarah sighed and took out a particularly gay card of cunning, little animals, clustered around a tree, to look at again for cheer.

Bennie's knock came at the door. No one ever knocked quite like Bennie—gently and hesitantly.

"Come in," she called. She had left the door open for him.

Bennie entered. It wasn't snowing this year, but there was snow on the ground and his scarlet cap and muffler stood out sharply against the white.

"Cookie for Bennie," he said, smiling foolishly.

"Right there on the table. An Angel—two angels for Bennie to

eat now, and a bag for mother and one for Bennie."

He finished the second cookie with little, animal-like grunts of pleasure, then walked over to her and picked up the Christmas card she had been admiring. "Pretty, pretty. Bennie wants."

"Oh, no, Bennie. That's my Christmas card. I'll keep it 'til after the holidays, then you can have it."

She tried to take it from him, but suddenly the smile was gone from his lips and there was a strange look in his eyes.

"Bennie wants now," he repeated harshly. "Give Bennie, or he'll have to kill you, like he did the other lady, when she wouldn't give him the card he wanted."

Sheer horror swept over her. So it had been Bennie who had killed Ellen, gentle, harmless Bennie! No one would ever believe her unless—

Her mind worked quickly. She could prove it. She gathered her wits together.

"All right, Bennie. You can have the card."

"Good, good." He shambled back and forth on his legs like a great bear. "Bennie not want to kill cookie lady."

His greed for food had saved her.

"Bennie, I have an even prettier card upstairs. You stay here and eat another cookie. I'll go get it."

"Bennie have this, too?"

"Oh, yes."

"Bennie wait."

She got herself up the stairs to the telephone in the hall, told Nettie, who managed the switchboard, to send Sid and the constable to her house at once, she had Ellen's murderer.

Then she took a postcard of flamingoes from her mirror, which someone had sent her from Florida, and went back to Bennie.

"See, isn't this pretty?" She showed him the card, pointing out the birds. She talked and fed him cookies until the men came. When they were in the kitchen, she reached out for the card with the Christmas tree and the animals, which he still held.

"You can't keep that one, Bennie," she said firmly.

"Then I'll kill you like I killed the other lady when she wouldn't give Bennie her card."

Just as Sarah had thought, the men behind him meant nothing, he was so intent on the card.

With a sickening remembrance of the corner of a card clasped in Ellen's hand, she reached for hers.

Bennie reached for her neck, but Sid and the constable caught him.

The Christmas Murder had been solved.

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